



# Cartersville City School System

Cartersville, Georgia

**March 13 - 16, 2022**

**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

215088

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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:	4
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:	3	EM:	4
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:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	4
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	3
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	4
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:	3	SU:	2	EM:	3
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3

## 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:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	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.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	4
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.									Impacting
	EN:	4	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.									Impacting
	EN:	4	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:	3	SU:	3	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:	4
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.									Impacting
	EN:	4	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.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3

## 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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
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:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
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:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
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:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	3
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

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:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	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	345.81	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 Accreditation Engagement Review for Cartersville City School System was conducted entirely remotely. The Engagement Review Team gained as much information as possible to rate the Cognia Performance Standards by reviewing the evidence and engaging all stakeholder groups in the remote process. Quality information gathering sessions included a presentation by the superintendent, interviews with 138 stakeholders representing all stakeholder groups, and a deep dive into the evidence provided to the team. The team found the following themes across the school system and provided suggestions for the next steps.

**The school system implements a supportive learning culture based on strong positive relationships.** In many interviews, the words family, relational, caring, love, inclusive, respect, and supportive were used to describe the school system. Every stakeholder group shared the pride in being a "Purple Hurricane" as internal and external stakeholders spoke of being a part of the "Cane Family" in Cartersville City. Many stakeholders shared how they were products of Cartersville City Schools and had returned to give back to the community that had been so good to them. When students were asked what they thought of their schools, many quickly responded with some of the descriptors listed above, in addition to noting how progressive their schools are. One student stated, "Teachers make us want to hold ourselves to higher standards." Community members, parents, and staff shared how the school system benefits from the unique features of the close-knit community. Stakeholders also shared how the sense of community is reinforced by the multiple communication avenues used by the school system. Interviews and documents validated Schoology for accessing course materials for teachers, students, and parents; Blackboard messaging, PowerSchool usage for communicating student performance to parents, students, and teachers; Office 365 for cloud storage of files that can be shared from any location, updated websites; frequent social media postings, Family Nights; parent/teacher organizations, active School Governance Councils (SGTs), Superintendent's Advisory Committees, CTAE Advisory Council, Partners in Education activities, and the superintendent being actively engaged in Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and other local civic clubs and organizations. One community member stated, "We could almost be on information overload based on all the communication avenues used by the district."

The system's mission is to inspire all students to build the skills and confidence to find their passions and achieve their goals with a vision of *Building Legacies-One Student at a Time*. Document reviews and interviews revealed focused efforts on preparing students for post-secondary options. Evidence divulged Advanced Placement courses, increased number of CTAE courses and pathways, increased number of students taking dual enrollment courses, and numerous work-based learning opportunities. Many staff members shared how all students are provided guidance into a career pathway with the

YouScience assessment administered in middle and high schools. “All of these programs and services for helping our students prepare for their educational futures are components of our supportive culture,” stated an internal stakeholder.

Staff members were proud to share the system’s success story with a graduation rate that has exceeded 90% for the past four years. Administrators shared how this graduation rate is connected to “Safety and Well-Being,” one of the seven pillars of the emerging accountability system, *True Accountability*, that is evidence-based and student-centric.

The importance of building relationships and developing soft skills was evident in every interview and multiple documents. Staff shared how Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) is the framework used by educators in the school system to build and increase trust and connection with students in a cohesive environment. Teachers spoke of how CKH helps them strengthen students’ connectedness to others by enhancing healthy bonds and establishing collaborative agreements of acceptable behavior. Students at every level spoke of their social contracts developed in various classrooms. Administrators shared that half of the staff have already been trained in CKH, with plans for additional training in the future. Other advocacy and relationship-building structures shared by staff and students include weekly classroom visits by school counselors at the primary and elementary schools, an administrator and counselor assigned to each grade level at the middle school, a dedicated counselor assigned to ninth graders, counselors assigned by alphabet for grades 10 through 12 so that students in the same families have the same counselor and keep that counselor for three years, a strong Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) with a social-emotional component, system-wide implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), mentoring from staff as well as from outside collaboratives and agencies, Sources of Strength program at the secondary level, and the Navigation Center for support services for students and families in need. “What we are most proud of is our WRAP Team approach which is an extension of our MTSS process. Each school has a WRAP team to truly wrap their arms around a child in need. WRAP teams have counselors, social workers, and staff focusing on targeted students, analyzing their needs, and planning a system of support,” stated a school leader. Documents and interviews substantiated the recent addition of four social workers and two counselors, bringing the total to 12 counselors for the four schools. Records also revealed the addition of a system-wide Behavior Intervention Specialist and classified staff members as Family Engagement Specialists at each of the schools. “No student flies under the radar in this school district,” stated a system employee.

Overall, learners demonstrated a positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful sense of community. The school system is applauded for its programs and practices that are yielding results in building strong, positive relationships and is encouraged to continuously evaluate the programs and services to ensure students continue developing positive relationships with adults and peers that support their educational experiences.

**The dedicated leadership team provides clear direction and a focus on continuous improvement.**

As evidenced through interviews with every stakeholder group, the superintendent is a strong leader and has led the school system in a shared vision of *Building Legacies-One Student at a Time*. Interviews with system-level and school-level administrators revealed educators who are focused on instruction and student learning. Document reviews and interviews substantiated a leadership team that meets regularly and is always seeking ways to better serve children. “The growth mindset is real in Cartersville City Schools,” shared an internal stakeholder. When asked about the superintendent and leaders, stakeholders used the following descriptors: dedicated, passionate, highly respected, challenging, intentional, focused on excellence, available, and transparent. All stakeholders spoke of how the entire leadership team is moving in the same direction. Students shared how visible the superintendent and leadership are at their school events. “The leaders are in our schools every day and at our school events after school hours,” stated one high school student. Another said, “I was in a regional competition for my

one-act play and looked out in the audience, and there sat my superintendent. How gratifying that was for me to see that he made the effort to attend.” Yet another student shared, “We have a great school system. Teachers and leaders genuinely care. Visit us on Friday night. It’s electric with everyone from the schools and community together.”

As evidenced through board minutes and interviews, the governing authority commits to the establishment and adherence to policies that promote the system’s effective operations. Board members participate in multiple training opportunities and continuously provide leadership with autonomy for day-to-day operations. The Executive Summary revealed the recognition of the BOE (Board of Education) by the Georgia School Boards Association as the recipient of the Leading Edge Award in 2021 based on the BOE’s guidance in ensuring students are competitive in an ever-changing global market. Another BOE recognition was for its support of innovative practices at the Canes Navigation Center since 2019 to provide a wide range of support for students in need, from school supplies and clothes to a washer and dryer. One community member described the BOE as a “professionally-run group that holds itself and others accountable.”

The laser focus on continuous improvement is substantiated through the documentation of the collaborative process implemented to develop the strategic direction for the school system. Over an 18-month period, the system involved many stakeholders in the planning process. The Executive Summary and the superintendent’s presentation shared the rollout of a new vision, mission, and core values with a sharpened focus on inspiring and empowering students to thrive now and in the future. To support the core values of the system, all internal stakeholders shared Cartersville’s decision to participate in the movement to expand the existing accountability system to one that is an educator-led, evidence-based, student-centric, community-based accountability system that moves far beyond test scores and A-F rankings. “We are proud to be one of eleven school systems in Georgia to spearhead *True Accountability* with seven pillars and 27 elements,” shared the superintendent. System and school leaders discussed how the pillars and elements will be guideposts to which the schools will align. These guideposts will be used to continuously monitor the school system and schools throughout the year. Several leaders shared how the system is in year one of *True Accountability*’s full implementation. There are monthly meetings with building leadership to review, assess, and measure progress toward goals.

The superintendent shared with pride the numerous awards earned by schools across the system and highlighted the system’s graduation rate of over 90% for the past four years. “CCSS is ranked 13 of 183 school systems according to Niche’s 2021 Best Schools in Georgia,” stated the superintendent. Documents revealed that the primary school was named a Title One Distinguished School for the past two years, and the high school was named an Advanced Placement Honor School for the past three years. Board members and system leaders not only highlighted success in student achievement but also noted pride in strategic resource management. Records substantiated a healthy fund balance, clean audit reports, low millage rates, a data-driven Facilities Plan being implemented in phases, and the passage of six SPLOSTs (Special Local Option Sales Tax) to support the school system’s capital outlay projects.

The team commends the system on its strong leadership and encourages the ongoing commitment to using systems thinking principles and planning so that it is deeply ingrained and protected throughout the operations of the school system.

**Meaningful stakeholder engagement and intentional communication efforts are cornerstones of the school system’s success.** Artifacts and interviews indicated the inclusion of all stakeholder groups in the development of the strategic direction for the school system. Over the 18-month period that the system reviewed and adopted a new vision, mission, and core values, system leaders hosted multiple meetings and conversations with a wide variety of stakeholders, including families and staff members,

as well as representatives from local businesses, industry, government, post-secondary institutions, and clergy to learn their hopes and dreams for their students. The superintendent shared how the system promoted the system's renewed tenets by utilizing such methods as providing bracelets for all staff that include the vision, mission, and core values, outfitting buses and school system vehicles with a magnetic plaque displaying the new vision, placing a letter from the superintendent in the Back-to-School magazine, and sharing the principles on social media.

Documents and interviews revealed *Shared Leadership* as one of the six core values of the school system. Administrators and teachers highlighted the system's commitment to a vision of shared leadership that is collaborative and courageous. Every interview group shared how the system invites all community stakeholders to contribute to the decision-making process. "We look forward to the momentum that occurs when the hopes and dreams of the community fuse with the expertise of caring educators," shared a system leader.

Community members, parents, staff, and students were well-represented in the groups interviewed by the team, and each group spoke of regularly scheduled sessions to get their input. Participating in the comprehensive needs assessment process, School Governance Councils (SGCs), CTAE advisory committees, parent/teacher groups, Title One parent meetings, and Partners in Education were just a few of the opportunities afforded stakeholder groups. "Various groups are also surveyed, and leaders meet with us to discuss survey results and ask for input on next steps for improvement," shared a stakeholder. Parent, student, teacher, and community surveys are some of the many surveys the system had administered to guide decision-making. Students shared that their input is also gathered through active student councils. Numerous examples were provided by students of how their feedback is used in decision-making, with one example being the decision not to have school uniforms based on student input. Interviews with community members substantiated strong community support and buy-in with positive, long-standing relationships with city and county organizations leading to collaborative partnerships and initiatives. "The Cartersville Schools Foundation and Gate Key Scholarship Program are two awesome examples of stakeholder engagement in support of the school system's vision and mission. In fact, the Gate Key Scholarship Program has touched the lives of 168 students since its inception," stated a school leader. Another shared how 40 high school students have participated in the Bartow Youth Leadership Program sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. Others spoke of the work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeships afforded students by the business community. "We have a student who was named Northwest Region Youth Apprenticeship Completer of the Year after having successfully participated in the Transportation and Logistics Pathway," stated a system leader. Other stakeholders shared partnerships that have resulted in such programs and initiatives as Backpack Buddies, Mentor Canes, and Least of These.

Internal stakeholders reported their input is valued and are heavily engaged in the school system's collaborative decision-making process. System leaders shared information about regularly scheduled meetings to review student data and make system-wide decisions to impact student achievement. Teachers spoke of collaboration to review curriculum, pacing guides, and student performance data. Without exception, every stakeholder group spoke of their meaningful engagement in the collaborative culture for supporting learners in pursuit of their goals.

The system's communication efforts directly connect to its successful stakeholder engagement. During internal and external stakeholder group interviews, the team repeatedly heard the words "intentional, collaborative, community, and accessible" as system participants spoke with pride of their communications with families and the community. In addition to the numerous surveys administered and analyzed as a part of the continuous improvement process, the system uses multiple media avenues. Artifacts validated the use of Schoology, Blackboard messaging, Power School, Office 365, updated

system and school websites, and frequent social media outlets. System leaders shared the analytics on the website and social media avenues as a way of continuously monitoring stakeholder engagement.

The system expects active engagement of all stakeholder groups and is committed to *Community Engagement and Partnerships* as one of the seven pillars in the newly adopted True Accountability system. The review team encourages the system to ensure these practices and programs continue in a formalized manner in order for them to become ingrained throughout the culture of the school system.

**Even with the school system's focus on continuous improvement, the system lacks developing formalized processes and procedures, so desired practices, programs, and services are implemented, monitored, and evaluated for quality and fidelity throughout the system.** One example of the lack of formalized processes is opportunities for the cultivation of leaders. Many examples of providing leadership opportunities were shared to include membership on SGCs, grade level and department chairs, Teacher Support Specialist positions, Student Support Specialist positions, Instructional Technology Specialist positions, Special Education Department Leads, Capturing Kids Hearts Committee members, and serving as mentor teachers. Students shared their opportunities as a part of Student Councils, Little Legacies at the primary school, JROTC, clubs, athletic teams, and fine arts productions. Although many staff members shared work experiences that support leadership development, the superintendent acknowledged the lack of a formalized program or process for cultivating leaders and stated a desire to begin a formalized Leadership Academy.

Interviews and artifacts did not validate a formalized, system-wide instructional framework. When asked, most educators reported lots of autonomy at the school level. "We have good leaders as principals and assistant principals. We have added Teacher Support Specialists, Student Engagement Specialists, and Instructional Technology Specialists at every school. We don't really have a system-wide instructional framework. Our common direction is that everyone will be teaching the essential standards, and we have the persons in place at each school to ensure effective instruction is occurring," stated an internal stakeholder. Another shared, "We have lots of autonomy and are chipping away at the newly adopted *True Accountability* system. We are trying to fixate on some targets and are in a bit of transition with all of this process." When asked about lesson plans and requirements for planning for differentiation and inquiry-based activities across courses and subjects, staff members mostly responded with some specific examples used in their classrooms but not of any system-wide plans and expectations. "We are building the STEM facility, so that will help us with innovation, collaborative problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning," stated a staff member. Most stakeholder groups reinforced the idea that instructional expectations are the responsibility of the individual principals without a common system-wide instructional framework.

System leaders noted very little problem recruiting and retaining staff when asked about recruitment processes and procedures. "We depend on school culture as a big factor for staff retention," shared an internal stakeholder. Very little data was shared regarding the percentage of staff with advanced degrees, percentage nearing retirement, information on program expansions that will require additional staff, and other personnel statistics that are typically part of a formalized staff recruitment and retention plan. The superintendent shared the recent expansion of the induction and mentoring program to ensure a more formalized approach to the support of new teachers. The team also asked about formalized processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the many newly added positions. Most of the interviews did not substantiate any requirements of the various specialists having to document daily activities, modeling, delivery of professional development sessions, classroom observations, data digs, and other such practices and support to ensure strategic alignment of human resources with system needs. In addition, a system leader shared the use of an instructional resource form that has to be completed when a teacher requests instructional materials and resources. Yet, artifacts and interviews revealed a multitude of curricular and instructional resources and software programs used at each



school. When asked about standard operating procedures, system-wide curricular and instructional expectations, and how programs are evaluated for effectiveness, efficiency, and system-wide consistency, every stakeholder group reinforced the autonomy at the school level instead of systems' approaches.

Documents revealed a system expectation that collaborative planning will occur. Interviews validated many versions of professional learning communities (PLCs), with some schools having common planning times embedded within their master schedule while others do not. Some meet weekly, while some meet twice per month. Some staff shared that there is a common expectation to hold PLCs, and it ends there. "Schools have total autonomy about PLCs," stated a system educator.

When asked about professional development, internal stakeholders noted a system-wide focus on Capturing Kids Hearts. Documents and interviews revealed all other professional development was mostly within a given building and was curriculum-specific and school-specific. "We encourage staff to participate in Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) trainings, especially for special endorsements," stated a system leader. When asked about system-wide non-negotiables for instruction or professional development, the only ones mentioned by staff included system-wide expectations for technology such as usage of Office 365, Schoology, Blackboard messaging, and how teachers set up voice mail.

Numerous internal stakeholders reported on many procedures and processes not being written in a formal manner. "We are small. We know our students. Our students and parents just know us and know we are truly invested in them," shared an educator. "You could use the term generational to describe us. Most of us have been around for a while, and we just have institutional memory and know how things operate," stated an internal stakeholder. The team acknowledges the success of CCSS but strongly encourages formalizing processes, practices, and procedures to sustain growth over time. Implementing more systemic and systematic actions could lead to practices and programs becoming deeply ingrained and protected throughout the culture and operations of the school system.

Having a strong, positive culture focused on building relationships, a dedicated leadership team with a clear direction and focus on continuous improvement, and meaningful stakeholder engagement resulting in strong parent and community support are at the center of success for the school system. The Engagement Review Team members listened carefully to the stakeholders of the system and appreciated their willingness to share information about strengths and challenges. For increased success and educational improvement for all students, the team suggests that the school system focus on implementing formalized, systematic processes and procedures so desired practices, programs, and services are implemented, monitored, and evaluated for quality and fidelity to ensure organizational consistency. These themes present opportunities for continued growth that could positively impact student achievement and system effectiveness and need to be sustained and ingrained in all school system aspects.

## 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)
<b>Cheryl Allread, Lead Evaluator</b>	Dr. Cheryl Allread's career spans over 48 years. She retired from Marion County Schools in South Carolina after seven years as a math and science teacher, 11 years as a principal, 11 years as an assistant superintendent for instruction, and seven years as a district superintendent. After retirement from 36 years in Marion County, she began working as a consultant with the South Carolina State Department of Education, serving as a liaison for low-performing schools. She also conducted academic audits, served as a principal mentor, and served as a leadership coach in instructional supervision. Dr. Allread currently works as a Lead Evaluator for Cognia in schools and systems across the United States and internationally, as well as continuing to work as a consultant with schools and systems in instructional supervision.
<b>Melanie Burton-Brown, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning</b>	
<b>Lisa Edwards, Coordinator of Data Analysis and School Support</b>	
<b>Latrina Pennamon-Nash, Principal</b>	
<b>Michele Taylor, Superintendent</b>	



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