



STEM Certification Engagement Review

July 01, 2025 - June 30, 2026

Beaufort Jasper Academy for Career Excellence

Institution #210008

80 Lowcountry Drive
Ridgeland, South Carolina 29936
United States of America

Certification Is Continuous Improvement

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." Accreditation and certification are continuous improvement processes that help an institution improve teaching and learning. Using Cognia's STEM Certification Standards, the institution examines its current effectiveness as well as its capacity and capability to achieve its vision and goals for the future of its STEM education model.

Cognia believes all institutions can improve no matter how well they are currently performing. 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 its unique improvement journey. Cognia expects institutions to use the results and analyses of data from diverse sources to select and implement actions that drive improvement in education quality and student performance. Cognia recognizes that each institution's improvement journey is unique and that we can serve you best by providing key findings specific to your institution.

Cognia's STEM Certification guides leaders with a specific framework and improvement process, culminating in recognition for programs that demonstrate a strong and effective STEM focus.

Cognia Certification and the Engagement Review

This report contains the findings of the STEM Certification Engagement Review. The evaluators look for hallmarks of quality as described in Cognia's STEM Certification Standards. These standards, which Cognia identified through robust research and extensive observations, focus on characteristics like problem-based experiential learning and the integration of STEM thinking into a broad range of activities and learning opportunities.

The findings are organized into three sections: Cognia STEM Certification Standards, a Summary of Key Characteristics, and a Summary of Findings that includes Noteworthy Practices and Areas for Improvement. Using a set of rigorous research-based standards, the certification 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 in the STEM education model. Through the Cognia Accreditation and Certification Process, highly skilled and trained evaluators gather firsthand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution's performance against research based Cognia Performance Standards. Using these standards, evaluators assess the quality of the STEM learning environment to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning as well as the operation of the institution.

To build a comprehensive evaluation of your institution, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality through a review of documented evidence, formal and informal observations, and community feedback. Using the standards as a framework, the evaluators provide valuable guidance which will help to focus your institution's improvement journey.

Results from the Certification Review provide guidance and insight into an institution's continuous improvement efforts in STEM education.



STEM Standards Evaluation Results

Certification is based primarily on the evaluation of evidence that reflects an institution's ability to meet the expectations as defined by the Cognia STEM Certification Standards. The standards define the elements of quality that research indicates is present in an effective institution. STEM Certification Standards provide the guideposts to delivering a high-quality STEM education. The STEM Certification Review applies a four-level rubric to determine the degree to which the institution demonstrates effective practices that reflect the expectations of the standard. The rubric scale is designed to indicate the current performance of the institution.

The rubric is scored from Level 4 to Level 1. Descriptions are provided in the table below.

RATING	LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
★★★★★	4	Demonstrating noteworthy systematic and systemic practices producing clear results that positively impact learners.
★★★★☆	3	Engaging in practices that provide evidence of expected effectiveness that is reflected in the standard.
★★★☆☆	2	Developing or improving practices that provide evidence that effort approaches desired level of effectiveness.
★☆☆☆☆	1	Reflecting areas with insufficient evidence and/or limited activity leading toward improvement.

Performance Standards Ratings

Culture of Learning Standards

A good institution nurtures and sustains a healthy culture for learning. In a healthy culture, learners, parents, and educators feel connected to the purpose and work of the institution as well as behave in alignment with the stated values and norms. The institution also demonstrates evidence that reflects the mission, beliefs, and expectations of the institution (e.g., student work; physical appearance of the institution; participation in institution activities; parents' attendance at institution functions).

Keys to Culture of Learning

A healthy culture is evident where:

- Stakeholders are actively engaged and supportive of the institution's mission
- Learners' academic and non-academic needs and interests are the focal point
- Stakeholders are included and supported

Standard 1



Learners engage in STEM learning experiences that integrate all STEM disciplines with an emphasis on processes and practices associated with STEM.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL DESCRIPTION

4	4 - Learners consistently engage in curriculum that systematically integrates content across all STEM disciplines*. Learners continuously participate in STEM processes and practices (e.g., Design Thinking Process, NGSS STEM Practices, engineering design). *Curriculum may include additional content disciplines in schools that have adopted other inclusive models of integrated learning, such as the arts for STEAM schools.
3	3 - Learners regularly engage in curriculum that formally integrates content across all STEM disciplines*. Learners routinely participate in STEM processes and practices (e.g., Design Thinking Process, NGSS STEM Practices, engineering design). *Curriculum may include additional content disciplines in schools that have adopted other inclusive models of integrated learning, such as the arts for STEAM schools.
2	2 - Learners occasionally engage in curriculum that integrates content across all STEM disciplines*. Learners sometimes participate in STEM processes and practices (e.g., Design Thinking Process, NGSS STEM Practices, engineering design). *Curriculum may include additional content disciplines in schools that have adopted other inclusive models of integrated learning, such as the arts for STEAM schools.
1	1 - Learners rarely engage in curriculum that systematically integrates content across all STEM disciplines*. Learners seldom participate in STEM processes and practices (e.g., Design Thinking Process, NGSS STEM Practices, engineering design). *Curriculum may include additional content disciplines in schools that have adopted other inclusive models of integrated learning, such as the arts for STEAM schools.

Standard 2

Professional staff members implement high quality STEM courses and curriculum aligned to recognized standards and organized into interdisciplinary frameworks.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL DESCRIPTION

4	4 - Professional staff members implement a formal, systematic process for aligning courses to adopted and recognized sets of standards and/or benchmarks. A rigorous STEM curriculum is consistently organized around multiple real-world, interdisciplinary, problem-based and/or project-based units of study.
3	3 - Professional staff members routinely implement a process for aligning courses to adopted and recognized sets of standards and/or benchmarks. The STEM curriculum is regularly organized around multiple real-world, interdisciplinary, problem-based and/or project-based units of study.
2	2 - Professional staff members occasionally implement a process for aligning courses to adopted and recognized sets of standards and/or benchmarks. The STEM curriculum is sometimes organized around interdisciplinary, project-based units of study.
1	1 - Professional staff members rarely implement a process for aligning courses to adopted and recognized sets of standards and/or benchmarks. The STEM curriculum is seldom organized around interdisciplinary, project-based units of study.



Leadership for Learning Standards

The ability of a leader to provide leadership for learning is a key attribute of a good institution. Leaders who engage in their own learning while tangibly supporting the learning process for learners and teachers have a significant positive impact on the success of others. Leaders must also communicate the learning expectations for all learners and teachers continuously, with consistency and purpose. The expectations are embedded in the culture of the institution, reflected by learners', teachers', and leaders' behaviors and attitudes toward learning.

Keys to Leadership for Learning

Leadership for learning is demonstrated when school leaders:

- Communicate expectations for learning
- Influence and impact the culture in positive ways
- Model and engage in learning while supporting others to do so

Standard 3

Professional staff members and leaders participate in an ongoing system of STEM-specific professional learning.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
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4	4 - Professional staff members and leaders engage in a regular and frequent formal program of professional learning for specific areas of responsibility such as STEM disciplinary content knowledge or instructional coaching. The program of STEM professional learning consistently results in school-wide improvements in STEM instructional practices.
3	3 - Professional staff members and leaders regularly engage in a program of professional learning for specific areas of responsibility such as STEM disciplinary content knowledge or instructional coaching. The program of STEM professional learning routinely results in school-wide improvements in STEM instructional practices.
2	2 - Professional staff members and leaders occasionally engage in professional learning for specific areas of responsibility such as STEM disciplinary content knowledge or instructional coaching. The program of STEM professional learning sometimes results in improvements in STEM instructional practices.
1	1 - Professional staff members and leaders rarely engage in professional learning for specific areas of responsibility such as STEM disciplinary content knowledge or instructional coaching. The program of STEM professional learning seldom results in improvements in STEM instructional practices.

Standard 4

Leaders engage a diverse network of community partners and stakeholders in order to support and sustain STEM programs and initiatives.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
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4	4 - Leaders demonstrate a systematic approach to partnership with a diverse group of community organizations, including local businesses, STEM practitioners, and institutions of higher education. Leaders proactively seek, and consistently receive, resources and support from STEM partners to improve STEM
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teaching and learning.

3 - Leaders routinely engage in partnership activities with a diverse group of community organizations, which may include local businesses, STEM practitioners, and institutions of higher education. Leaders proactively seek, and regularly receive, resources and support from STEM partners to improve STEM teaching and learning.

2 - Leaders occasionally engage in partnership activities with community organizations such as local businesses, STEM practitioners, or institutions of higher education. Leaders sometimes seek and receive resources and support from STEM partners to improve STEM teaching and learning.

1 - Leaders seldom engage in partnership activities with community organizations such as local businesses, STEM practitioners, or institutions of higher education. Leaders rarely seek or receive resources and support from STEM partners to improve STEM teaching and learning.

Standard 5

Leaders ensure that all stakeholders have ongoing opportunities to access information and learn about STEM implementation.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
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4	4 - Leaders engage a formal process to share and communicate STEM vision, mission, goals, outcomes, responsibilities, roles, events, and activities to internal and external stakeholders. Leaders consistently plan for and facilitate STEM events and activities for the school community during and beyond the regular school day.
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3	3 - Leaders routinely share and communicate STEM vision, mission, goals, outcomes, responsibilities, roles, events, and activities to internal and external stakeholders. Leaders regularly plan for and facilitate STEM events and activities for the school community during and beyond the regular school day.
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2	2 - Leaders occasionally share and communicate STEM vision, mission, goals, outcomes, responsibilities, roles, events, or activities to internal and external stakeholders. Leaders sometimes plan for and facilitate STEM events and activities for the school community.
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1	1 - Leaders rarely share or communicate STEM vision, mission, goals, outcomes, responsibilities, roles, events, or activities to internal and external stakeholders. Leaders seldom plan for and facilitate STEM events and activities for the school community.
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Engagement of Learning Standards

A good institution ensures that learners are engaged in the learning environment. Learners who are engaged in the learning environment participate with confidence and display agency over their own learning. A good institution adopts policies and engages in practices that support all learners being included in the learning process.

Keys to Engagement of Learning

Engagement is demonstrated when all learners:



- Are included in the learning process
- Participate with confidence
- Have agency over their learning

Standard 6

Learners engage collaboratively in authentic inquiry during ongoing units of study.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
4	4 - Learners continually engage in authentic inquiry through systematically planned and implemented project-based units of study. Learners consistently work collaboratively to complete rigorous tasks, including problem identification, investigation, and analysis.
3	3 - Learners regularly engage in authentic inquiry through intentionally planned and implemented project-based units of study. Learners routinely work collaboratively to complete rigorous tasks, including problem identification, investigation, and analysis.
2	2 - Learners occasionally engage in authentic inquiry through project-based units of study. Learners sometimes work collaboratively to complete tasks including problem identification, investigation, or analysis.
1	1 - Learners seldom engage in authentic inquiry through project-based units of study. Learners rarely work collaboratively to complete tasks including problem identification, investigation, or analysis.

Standard 7

Learners engage in self-directed STEM learning guided by professional staff members who are effective facilitators of learning.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
4	4 - Learners consistently have opportunities to be critical and creative thinkers and are encouraged to be owners and managers of their own STEM learning experiences. Professional staff members continually serve as facilitators who provide guidance and support for learners to be self-directed.
3	3 - Learners regularly have opportunities to be critical and creative thinkers and to be owners and managers of their own STEM learning experiences. Professional staff members routinely serve as facilitators who provide guidance and support for learners to be self-directed.
2	2 - Learners occasionally have opportunities to be critical and creative thinkers and to take ownership of their own STEM learning experiences. Professional staff members sometimes serve as facilitators who provide guidance and support for learners to be self-directed.
1	1 - Learners rarely have opportunities to be critical and creative thinkers or to take ownership of their own STEM learning experiences. Professional staff members seldom serve as facilitators who provide guidance or support for learners to be self-directed.

Standard 8



Learners benefit from a formal structure of within-school and extracurricular opportunities to extend STEM learning.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL DESCRIPTION

4	4 - The institution consistently provides a variety of STEM-specific extracurricular and extended day opportunities for learners (e.g., clubs, competitions, summer camps). Leaders implement a systematic process to ensure that learners have multiple formal, age-appropriate opportunities to engage with STEM practitioners, community experts, and/or other STEM partners.
3	3 - The institution routinely provides a variety of STEM-specific extracurricular and extended day opportunities for learners (e.g., clubs, competitions, summer camps). Leaders implement multiple formal, age-appropriate opportunities for learners to engage with STEM practitioners, community experts, and/or other STEM partners.
2	2 - The institution occasionally provides STEM-specific extracurricular and extended day opportunities for learners (e.g., clubs, competitions, summer camps). Leaders sometimes implement age-appropriate opportunities for learners to engage with STEM practitioners, community experts, and/or other STEM partners.
1	1 - The institution rarely provides STEM-specific extracurricular and extended day opportunities for learners (e.g., clubs, competitions, summer camps). Leaders seldom implement opportunities for learners to engage with STEM practitioners, community experts, and/or other STEM partners.

Growth in Learning Standards

A good institution positively impacts learners throughout their journey of learning. A positive impact on the learner is reflected in readiness to engage in and preparedness for the next transition in their learning. Growth in learning is also reflected in learners' ability to meet expectations in knowledge and skill acquisition.

Keys to Growth in Learning

Growth is evident when:

- Learners possess non-academic skills that ensure readiness to learn
- Learners' academic achievement reflects preparedness to learn
- Learners demonstrate growth in meeting expectations of learning as defined by the institution
- Learners attain knowledge and skills necessary to achieve goals for learning

Standard 9

Learners demonstrate their learning through performance-based assessments and have opportunities to develop self-assessment and self-monitoring skills.

YOUR RATING



LEVEL DESCRIPTION

4	4 - Learners consistently engage in STEM-specific performance assessments that provide opportunities for public demonstrations of learning. Learners continually participate in activities that develop metacognitive skills, such as goal setting, formative self-assessment, and reflections on learning.
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- 3 - Learners regularly engage in STEM-specific performance assessments that provide opportunities for public demonstrations of learning. Learners routinely participate in activities that develop metacognitive skills, such as goal setting, formative self-assessment, and reflections on learning.
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- 2 - Learners occasionally engage in STEM-specific performance assessments to demonstrate learning. Learners sometimes participate in activities that develop metacognitive skills, such as goal setting, formative self-assessment, or reflections on learning.
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- 1 - Learners rarely engage in STEM-specific performance assessments to demonstrate learning. Learners seldom participate in activities that develop metacognitive skills, such as goal setting, formative self-assessment, or reflections on learning.
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Standard 10

Learners demonstrate STEM literacy outcomes that prepare them for the next level of learning and work.

YOUR RATING


LEVEL DESCRIPTION

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- 4 - Learners consistently progress through the STEM curriculum based on mastery of identified learning outcomes for each of the STEM disciplines, as well as content areas included in the institution's integrated model (e.g., STEAM, STREAM). Learners and professional staff continually collaborate in using assessment results in a meaningful way to ensure future success.
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- 3 - Learners regularly progress through the STEM curriculum based on mastery of identified learning outcomes for each of the STEM disciplines, as well as content areas included in the institution's integrated model (e.g., STEAM, STREAM). Learners and professional staff routinely collaborate in using assessment results in a meaningful way to ensure future success.
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- 2 - Learners occasionally progress through the STEM curriculum based on mastery of identified learning outcomes for the STEM disciplines. Learners and professional staff sometimes collaborate in using assessment results to ensure future success.
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- 1 - Learners seldom progress through the STEM curriculum based on mastery of identified learning outcomes for the STEM disciplines. Learners and professional staff rarely use assessment results to ensure future success.
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Insights from the Review

Guided by evidence, the evaluators arrived at findings that will inform your institution's continuous improvement efforts. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve STEM learning and organizational effectiveness.

The findings are organized into narratives around four Key Characteristics critical to the success of any educational institution: culture of learning, leadership for learning, engagement of learning, and growth in learning. The narratives also provide the next steps to guide your institution's improvement journey in its efforts to improve the quality of STEM education opportunities for all learners. The feedback provided in this Certification Engagement Review Report will assist your institution in reflecting on its current improvement efforts and adapting and adjusting your plans to continuously strive for improvement in your STEM education model.

Summary of Key Characteristics

Culture of Learning

Professional staff at Beaufort Jasper Academy for Career Excellence (ACE) implement high-quality STEM courses and curricula that are aligned to recognized standards and organized around multiple real-world, interdisciplinary units of study. The Self-Assessment validated commitment to the school's identity that is deeply rooted in hands-on, industry-focused education that equips learners with real-world skills. An emphasis on experiential learning, industry partnerships, and a commitment to producing skilled professionals who are ready for the workforce or higher education are distinguishing factors of the STEM program. With students coming from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, ACE provides an inclusive learning environment that fosters problem-solving, creativity, and technical expertise. STEM principles are integrated into 12 unique career pathways, ensuring that learners develop a well-rounded skill set. Each Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway uses field-specific, industry-recognized curricula that ensures learners are learning high-quality, standards-based content in real-world contexts. Specific examples from the narratives and interviews include barbering, cosmetology, and nail technology programs that use the comprehensive Milady curriculum aligned to state licensure and national cosmetology standards; the building construction and electricity programs that implement the rigorous, competency-based modules of the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) curriculum; automotive technology that leverages the diagnostic, mechanical, and service processes and procedures required by Toyota and Ford training modules; and welding instruction aligned to the American Welding Society standards. These curricular frameworks are not only rigorous but also deeply embedded in project-based and interdisciplinary instruction, reinforcing the STEM culture of applied, collaborative, and future-focused learning. Learners in the building construction pathway shared how they construct storage sheds by applying skills in measurement, framing, roofing, and finishing. Students in the electricity pathway explained how they build temporary meter boxes for a local contractor, simulating worksite tasks that require them to apply safety, design, and writing competencies. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and health science students complete clinical rotations and job shadowing at local hospitals, nursing homes, and emergency service providers.

Multiple data sources, including survey results, classroom observations, and readiness assessments, affirm a learning environment in which learners participate in STEM processes and practices with respect, relevance, and readiness driving daily practice. Survey results revealed 86% of educators provide students with opportunities aligned to their individual needs and future readiness, while 100% report that instruction focuses on learner needs and interests. Of the parents surveyed, 84% felt their children are prepared for the future. Results of observations using the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) reveal an average rating of 3.07 on the 4.0 scale in the Supportive Learning Environment, thus verifying a sense of community that is positive and cohesive. Stakeholder interviews further revealed a positive learning environment with such words as encouraging, resourceful, inspiring, genuine, collaborative, innovative, and unique use as descriptors for ACE. An average rating of 3.20 for the Active Learning Environment validated learners collaborating with peers to complete projects, activities, and assignments; making connections from content to real-life experiences; and being actively engaged in the learning experiences of a STEM-infused learning environment.

The team applauds ACE for establishing itself as a leader in creating an innovative, forward-thinking learning environment



that equips learners with the skills needed for future success with an integrated culture of STEM learning. Documents and the leadership presentation validated career pathways that incorporate physics, mathematics, technology, and writing to provide interdisciplinary learning experiences. While the hands-on instructional culture is robust, classroom observation data and evidence files revealed a gap in the effective integration of digital tools for problem-solving and collaboration. Evaluators suggest that the institution continue its focus on creating STEM-focused, student-led learning with some additional emphasis on opportunities for learners to use digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information for learning; to solve problems and create original works; and to communicate and work collaboratively.

Leadership for Learning

Leaders and professional staff demonstrate commitment to the cultivation of an environment of STEM engagement with an ongoing system of STEM-specific professional learning. Professional staff communicate high expectations for STEM learning and model best practices that illustrate the core values of interdisciplinary and inquiry-based approaches. The Self-Assessment highlighted the leaders' commitment to supporting staff members as they embrace a shared vision for STEM that inspires instructional improvements and encourages staff to participate in STEM professional learning opportunities that align with school goals. The leadership presentation and interviews included a description of the formalized, frequent professional development as vigorous as training led to schoolwide instructional improvements and elevation of the quality and consistency of STEM practices across all classrooms. The comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to professional learning is not only encouraged but systematically built into the school calendar and aligned to both content expertise and instructional best practices. Professional staff have opportunities to attend discipline-specific industry-recognized training to enhance the rigor and relevance of instruction across all CTE and academic programs. Examples of content-specific professional learning include the Yamaha certification training for the marine technology instructor to ensure students are taught the latest outboard engine diagnostics and repair protocols; training from Milady to support both instructional technique and student licensure readiness for the barbering, cosmetology, and nail tech instructors; and field-based training with Beaufort County EMS for EMS instructors to bridge classroom instruction with current protocols and pre-hospital care practices. In addition to the content-specific training, ACE provides robust internal and district-wide professional learning opportunities focused on schoolwide goals. Induction teachers and their mentors participate in monthly professional development sessions to support growth and reflective practice in early-career educators. Ongoing professional learning communities (PLCs) focus on key STEM-aligned instructional strategies. Examples highlighted in the Self-Assessment include writing in CTE courses, assessment and grading practices, student engagement strategies, and interdisciplinary project-based learning. Leaders and teachers spoke of the dynamic instructional culture in which professional learning is both continuous and targeted, leading to consistent school improvement in STEM teaching and learning. Staff surveys support these findings with 86% reporting that they provide students with future-focused learning experiences aligned to individual needs, 76% reporting participation in professional development that improved their instructional practice, and 92% reporting that leadership promotes professional learning aligned to the needs of students.

To support and sustain STEM programs and initiatives, leaders engage a network of community partners. During the prior school year, ACE facilitated 16 work-based learning internships while students earned 1,103 industry-recognized certifications, and 168 students completed CTE programs. ACE leaders have built an extensive network of community partnerships to extend STEM learning beyond the classroom. This diverse array of local businesses includes Gulfstream, Boeing, Safe Harbor Marinas, Beaufort County Fleet Services, Beaufort Memorial Hospital, Caliber Collision, active construction sites, local spas, barbershops, hair salons, and higher education institutions. Evidence files validated these partnerships that supply expertise and mentorship, as well as material and logistical support to the ACE programs. Leaders also reported the facilitation of off campus learning experiences for students to observe and interact with STEM professionals in their workplaces.

As leaders communicate continuously and ensure that stakeholders have opportunities to learn about STEM implementation, records verify that the school uses newsletters, social media, stakeholder meetings, and community events to provide clarity about program expectations and opportunities. Leaders also plan and facilitate STEM-related events during and beyond the regular school day, including SkillsUSA, Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and National Technical Honor Society activities. Records reveal that students participate in regional and national SkillsUSA



competitions each year to showcase the technical and professional skills they have developed. Although the qualitative and quantitative data support STEM initiatives, the staff noted a need for continued growth in stakeholder communication and expansion of partnerships. Evaluators commend ACE for its ongoing, robust system of STEM-specific professional learning that builds a collaborative, real-world-focused learning environment. The team encourages the school to refine its communication strategies and expand the formalized network of community partnerships to ensure students have equitable access to all available resources and to sustain the long-term program impact.

Engagement of Learning

Learners engage in authentic inquiry through systematically planned and implemented project-based units of study. Engagement in STEM learning is a defining feature of the instructional environment with consistent reinforcement through real-world relevance, student agency, and a supportive learning culture. Stakeholder surveys, classroom observations, and staff feedback demonstrate that learners are actively engaged, confident in their participation, and supported in taking ownership of their learning. Data from the eleot observations validate high levels of active engagement with an overall average rating of 3.20, learners making connections to real-world experiences as demonstrated by an average rating of 3.33, and learners being engaged in discussions/dialogues with each other and the teacher as verified by an average rating of 3.27. The program description highlighted the set of core values that drive the school's approach to STEM education, with student agency and confidence being one of the core values. Additional eleot ratings validate ACE's belief in empowering learners with such results as students actively monitoring their own learning progress rated at 3.20, and learners receiving feedback to improve understanding rated at 3.27. Survey results also confirm learners engaged in self-directed STEM learning. Staff surveys revealed 91% agree the school provides students with opportunities to explore real-world problems, 88% state that students are encouraged to collaborate and think critically, and 85% report that they intentionally design learning tasks to build confidence and support independent learning. Staff also noted structured systems such as advisory programs, the use of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), and project-based assessments as key strategies for cultivating learner agency. One of the key findings in the Self-Assessment addressed how structured support systems, voice and choice opportunities, and performance-based assessments nurture student confidence. Staff spoke of how engagement is not accidental, as teachers purposefully embed engagement in instructional planning and professional practice. Parents affirmed the culture of empowerment as they reported on how their children feel valued and confident in their STEM pathways and demonstrate readiness for postsecondary STEM success.

The school demonstrates a strong dedication to creating a STEM-rich learning environment for all students across all courses. The professional staff work diligently to embed STEM-focused learning into all curricular areas. Interviews revealed how collaborative sessions and targeted professional development foster more intentional STEM-focused, student-led engagement. Students apply framing, measurement, and finishing skills while developing entrepreneurship in the building construction classes. The students studying electricity gain authentic experience in job-site expectations by fabricating temporary meter boxes. EMS and health science students directly link content, culture, and career during their job shadowing and clinicals with hospitals, nursing homes, and emergency services. The school's approach to STEM learning is about creating authentic, hands-on experiences that spark curiosity, build confidence, and give students agency over their own learning. The Self-Assessment provided a plethora of evidence on intentional project-based units, collaborative inquiry, and real-world connections to ensure that students are active, empowered learners. Not only do the teachers serve as facilitators and guide students in becoming self-directed, independent thinkers, but they also differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all students.

Students benefit from a formal structure within school and extracurricular opportunities to extend STEM learning. On the Cognia Educator Survey, 81% of educators reported that the school uses a variety of resources to meet the needs and interests of learners, and 86% reported that they provide learners with opportunities aligned to their individual needs and future readiness. Documented examples of the STEM-specific extracurricular and extended learning opportunities include connecting students with industry professionals, community organizations, and authentic workplace environments. Staff shared how students have access to internships for high school credit with many community partners after completing their programs at ACE. Extracurricular STEM organizations that provide ACE students with opportunities for extended engagement and competition include HOSA, SkillsUSA, and the National Technical Honor Society. The Self-Assessment noted the accolades and recognition earned by ACE students at these regional and national competitions.



Overall, ACE students are active participants in a dynamic learning process that empowers them to explore and innovate. While the school excels in fostering inquiry-based learning, an identified area for growth is the desire to expand and deepen the network of community-based learning experiences and STEM-specific extracurricular programs. The team encourages a more purposeful and effective promotion of STEM opportunities through newsletters, emails, advisory committees, and teacher communications to increase the number of students participating in STEM opportunities beyond the school day.

Growth in Learning

The school demonstrates a commitment to supporting all students in the demonstration of STEM literacy outcomes and the attainment of knowledge and skills necessary to achieve goals for learning. Academic achievement, soft skills development, and workplace readiness demonstrate growth in learning. A combination of classroom observations, stakeholder feedback, and performance metrics confirms that students are meeting or exceeding expectations in STEM-related skill acquisition and preparation for future transitions. During the 2024–2025 school year, ACE students earned 1,103 industry certifications, completed 168 CTE programs, and participated in 16 work-based learning internships. The number of industry certifications earned, CTE programs completed, and internships served show measurable, real-world outcomes that indicate college and career readiness. Classroom observation data further support the narrative of growth as the average elect rating for students making real-world connections was 3.33, students participating in rigorous coursework was 2.80, and students demonstrating self-monitoring skills was 3.20. Staff surveys reflect alignment with the observation data as 91% of staff members report that students are encouraged to apply learning to real-world contexts, and 87% agree that students are developing both academic and employability skills necessary for success in postsecondary settings. Teachers also cited project-based learning and capstone projects as critical contributors to student growth. Growth in non-academic skills such as communication, teamwork, and responsibility is evident in the structure of mock interviews, employability rubrics, and soft-skills assessments embedded in the various pathways. Students have opportunities to self-assess using goal-tracking tools, capstone reflections, and instructor feedback.

Evidence files substantiate the school's commitment to continuous improvement. Over the past five years, ACE has implemented significant reforms to improve student outcomes. Records show the school's tracking of industry certification attainment, Perkins Indicators of Performance for evaluating CTE programs, and college/career readiness metrics to measure success. In response to data analysis, ACE has implemented targeted interventions, such as additional test preparation support and enhanced instruction in technical literacy. One notable example of the school's commitment to continuous improvement is its response to declining nail technician state board exam pass rates. Through data analysis, ACE identified that students struggled with the theoretical portion of the exam. The school implemented new instructional strategies, increased emphasis on writing skills, and adopted standards-based instruction, leading to a 64% improvement in pass rates.

While ACE students demonstrate strong academic and technical growth, an area identified for targeted improvement is post-graduation placement in career-aligned fields, higher education, or the military. Statistics reveal that 99% of the students complete their program at ACE with industry-recognized certifications, and almost all students who complete their program at ACE go on to graduate high school. Yet only 55% of the graduates from the Class of 2024 entered a college, a career aligned with their field of study, or the military. School leaders shared their goal to increase that rate to 65% by June 2026. Documents revealed the school's desire to strengthen the bridge between classroom learning and long-term outcomes. Current efforts include expansion of work-based learning opportunities, strengthening industry advisory board connections, and provision of follow-up support for graduates.

Evaluators commend the school for its commitment to STEM literacy outcomes that prepare learners for the next level of learning or work. The team suggests the expansion of postsecondary planning systems such as structured career counseling, program-aligned transition support, and expanded collaboration with industry and college partners to improve post-graduation placement in career-aligned fields, higher education or the military.



Summary of Findings

The review process focused on establishing evidence of effective practice and performance of the institution in relation to the STEM Certification Standards.

Noteworthy Practices

In conducting the review, the evaluators identified Noteworthy Practices that reflect significant areas of strength in the work of the institution. Although there are numerous examples of the institution's level of quality, the recognition of Noteworthy Practices reflects the greatest strengths of the institution.

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- 1 Leaders ensure that learners are continually engaged in authentic inquiry during ongoing units of study and guided by professional staff members who are effective facilitators of learning. Learners consistently work collaboratively to complete rigorous tasks as professional staff members continually provide guidance and support for learners to be self-directed.**

Standard 6

Standard 7

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- 2 The leaders and staff implement high-quality STEM courses and curricula and participate in an ongoing system of STEM-specific professional learning. A rigorous STEM curriculum is consistently organized around real-world, interdisciplinary units of study as professional staff members engage in a regular and frequent formal program of professional learning.**

Standard 2

Standard 3

Areas for Improvement

Using information collected and reviewed, the evaluators identified the following Areas for Improvement that will help the institution improve.

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- 1 Develop and implement a formalized plan to improve post-graduation placement in career-aligned fields, higher education, or the military.**

Standard 10

RATIONALE

If learners and professional staff collaborate in using assessment results and formalized postsecondary planning systems in a meaningful way, then learners may be prepared for the next level of learning and work, and future success could be ensured.



STEM Certification Recommendation

To recommend certification, the evaluator must confirm an overall standards rating of 2.7.

Your institution's score

3.5

Cognia will review the results of the Certification Engagement Review to make a final determination concerning certification status for your institution based on these findings.

Your Next Steps

The Certification Engagement Review provides independent, objective guidance in relation to the STEM Certification Standards and the institution's improvement journey. Upon receiving the Certification Engagement Review Report, your institution is expected to implement the following steps:

- Review and share the findings in this report with stakeholders.
- Use the findings from the report to guide and strengthen your institution's improvement efforts.
- Celebrate the successes noted in the report.
- Continue the improvement journey.
- Report to Cognia on your progress toward improvement.



Evaluator Roster

The Certification Review evaluators are professionals with varied backgrounds and professional experiences. All evaluators complete Cognia training to ensure knowledge and understanding of the Cognia tools and processes. The following professional(s) served on the Certification Review:

EVALUATOR NAME	BRIEF BIOGRAPHY
Cheryl Allread Lead Evaluator	Dr. Cheryl Allread’s career spans over 50 years. She retired from the public 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 retiring from 36 years in teaching and administration, 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 has worked for Cognia as a lead evaluator in schools and systems across the United States and internationally, served as a reader reviewer, supported schools and system as a consultant in instructional supervision. Currently, Dr. Allread serves Cognia as a regional accreditation evaluator.
Sandra Leatherwood	



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