



DeKalb County School District

Stone Mountain, Georgia

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System Accreditation Engagement Review

215065

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Cognia Continuous Improvement System

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

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

Initiate

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

Improve

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

Impact

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

Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

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

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

Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results

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

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

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

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

Leadership Capacity Domain

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

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	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.									Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Improving
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	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:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
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:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	3	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	4	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	2	EM:	4	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.										Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	3	
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	4	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	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:	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	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:	3	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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	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:	2	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.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	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:	4	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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	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:	4	IM:	2	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	332.74	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.

Given the restrictions for assembling, the review for the DeKalb County School District (DCSD) was conducted entirely "online" as a remote Engagement Review. In planning and conducting this review, it was the full intention of the Cognia Engagement Review Team (team) to gain as much information as possible to rate the Standards, review the evidence, and engage all stakeholders in the virtual process. The team was organized in such a way as to provide the most personal experience possible for the team members and for the institution.

All processes and protocols required for System Accreditation were followed, and the institution was rated against the System Standards. The Cognia Engagement Review Team engaged in quality information-gathering sessions that included presentations by the superintendent, interviews with 882 stakeholders, and a deep dive into the evidence provided to the team. The team attempted to gain insights into classroom learning environments by thorough, thoughtful, and reflective questions posed to administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It is within this context that the team offers the following insights that highlight themes across the organization and ideas for the next steps.

The DeKalb County School District demonstrates and continues to practice a solid growth mindset that focuses on improving teaching and learning with a renewed focus and increased accountability. Preparation work in anticipation of the review indicates that thoughtful and shared responsibility characterizes the work and philosophy of the school system. A strong commitment to the mission and vision was evident to the Engagement Review Team in all interactions with the administration, faculty, staff, and students. A culture is a group of people who behaves and sees themselves in relation to the mission. Cultures are further strengthened in times of hardship and difficulty. The system's mission is clear, and its commitment is evidenced through interviews with parents, students, teachers, and leaders. A variety of techniques are used by the system to engage stakeholders in understanding and committing to the purpose. Advisory committees are operating district-wide in every school (Parent Advisory Councils). A District Advisory Council provides opportunities for the system to engage with representatives from the various schools. Each school has its own volunteer program that is beginning to gear back up following the pandemic. Interviews with over 125 parents indicated that they feel engaged and have opportunities to give input. Some responses from parents indicated that they do not often know that their input has been taken, and they are seeing the results of their feedback. The system employs its own surveys that are deployed systematically. These surveys have been approved by Cognia and are available in 15 languages. Interpreters are sent into the community to provide support for understanding and completing these surveys. Interviews with teachers and parents indicated that they have the highest regard for the administration and for each other. Often during these conversations, the word "trust" was heard. This "trust" development filters down to the

students as well. DeKalb County School District (DCSD) is a “we” place where stakeholders are beginning to feel stronger ownership and affinity to the district and its purposes, especially at the school level. With the recent change in the superintendency, that trust relationship will take some time to establish. DCSD has been under the leadership of five superintendents since 2011. Regaining trust and sustaining improvement efforts are consistent challenges in times of leadership change. During the remote interview, teachers were asked to describe their system in one word, posted to a software program anonymously that creates a word cloud. Many of those choices were words like “family, caring, engaging,” but there were still many other terms that indicate that the trust levels will take time to improve. Various opportunities are provided for students to develop relationships with adults that support their educational needs. Additionally, students, when asked, expressed that they were comfortable asking for help. There does not appear to be a consistent formal advocacy program system-wide, but interviews indicated that students are having their social, emotional, and academic needs met. Teacher interviews, student interviews, and parent interviews stressed the culture of the school as being one of a ‘family,’ where each family member looks after the other. Parents stress that students have the support they need to be successful. School leaders and staff are open to discussions about student needs. This sense of ownership and affinity is not by accident. The system is encouraged to implement strategies that will continue the development of the trust relationship between the schools, community, and district leadership. Recent events have caused some of that most important trust to deteriorate.

Continuous improvement in the system is a robust, inclusive, formalized process that engages and enlists the input from stakeholders. Strategic goals were established for 2019-2024 that is rooted in the vision of “inspiring our community of learners to achieve educational excellence.” These goals are supported by a set of core beliefs, which capture the system beliefs and commitments to “make sure every decision supports quality teaching and learning; to ensure we meet every student’s academic, social, and emotional needs; to embrace the cultural diversity of our community as a strength; and, to hold everyone accountable for educational excellence.” The core areas addressed in this strategic plan include student success with equity and access, stakeholder engagement and communication, staff effectiveness, culture and climate, organizational excellence, and facilities. The expected outcomes for these core areas have the intended result of producing graduates as defined in the system’s vision for the DCSD graduate. To fully implement the goals, a Journey Towards Improvement Timeline was established by the superintendent, who arrived in July 2020. The process for implementing this timeline included a 100 Day Plan initiated by the superintendent. This plan included opportunities for the superintendent to meet and engage with all stakeholders across DeKalb County. At the end of that timeframe, a 100 Day Report was compiled and distributed to the greater community. Further implementation of the current plan was strengthened through stakeholder engagement opportunities and the first problem of practice being identified. The problem of practice identified the lack of a research-based school improvement framework. An intensive process was undertaken to align the system’s strategic plan, school improvement plans, goals of the superintendent, Cognia’s Performance Standards, and other key initiatives in the district. This process moved the district to institute a framework for improvement based on effective schools research (DCSD Effective Schools Framework/ESF). After a review of student performance data, this ESF serves as the focused paradigm to identify key elements that must exist to improve the schools and drives recent structural support system changes. Schools develop and implement their school improvement plans in alignment with the district’s strategic plan. Interviews with system staff indicated that several tools and relationships have assisted them in reflecting on practice and setting appropriate goals. The support from the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) from Harvard University also informs the process. Interviews indicate that stakeholders were engaged all along the way in the development and ongoing monitoring of the plan. Parent groups, advisory groups, and district advisory groups provide support and input into the plan. System leadership has identified the school improvement framework conditions that are required

for sustainable change, which include ensuring that principals are instructional leaders, appropriate and meaningful professional learning is delivered, relevant data is effectively analyzed, resources are equitably distributed, and clear coherence and consistency with fidelity characterizes the implementation. Clear and consistently applied standard operating procedures assure uniform adherence to protocols and foster continuous improvement. These are necessary tools to manage the work of such a large school district. Protocols are available for every phase of schooling, including athletics and student activities, coaching and induction practices, student health services, equity and diversity, exceptional student support, leadership development, marketing, strategic communication, and more. Handbooks provide appropriate information for parents, students, and teachers. Year One of this process focused on the alignment of the work of all parties (schools and central office). Year Two is focused on evaluating the two questions (how we evaluate schools and how we provide the right support). Year Three will be focused on the implementation of empowering opportunities.

The school system focuses on providing high levels of support for continuous improvement as close to the needs as possible through a restructured support system. A more decentralized focus emphasizes the schoolhouse as the unit of change. As a result of the system's first identification of a problem of practice and through a thoughtful and purposeful timeline, the district has reorganized for improvement. The role of the seven regional superintendents has been more clearly defined to act as principal leaders in providing instructional leadership, supportive interactions, supporting the development of productive partnerships, and supporting data literacy. This new role, as defined by the Leadership Academy, is to "serve as the critical linchpin between building leaders and the district to ensure that principals are set up for success." Interviews with administrators in every school indicate that the regional superintendents and their supporting micro-cabinets provide close-to-home support and are immediately responsive and accessible for any need. When asked about some of the most recent changes that have made the biggest impact on their ability to be instructional leaders, the common response was the support from their region. Given the size of the school district (90,000+ students and 138 schools), this decentralized approach to leadership is beginning to positively impact teaching and learning. In addition to the support provided by the regional structures in instructional excellence, a system of progress monitoring has been instituted, built on the Plan, Do, Check, Act model centered on a set of protocol questions to be answered jointly with the superintendents and the school leaders under their supervision. This monitoring and process occur quarterly with the support of the divisions and the system with a first question of "what is the data telling us?" Areas that are monitored include academic performance data, social/emotional factors (in and out of school suspensions, referral data), school engagement data (attendance), and data with respect to on/off track for graduation. These monitoring processes, along with each school's improvement planning process aligned to district goals, provide consistent and effective quality assurance.

The system's support divisions also were studied to ensure that all appropriate support areas were identified, and in that process, some of the division titles were renamed to better communicate their roles. Support is tiered for schools to provide the most appropriate resources to meet needs. Horizon Schools (27 in number) are schools that are a combination of DCSD Intensive Support Schools and the GaDOE state-identified schools. Schools may also be designated as Launch Schools (ones not on the "list" but are being watched very closely to change the trajectory of performance), Soar Schools (some exemplary practices are in place), and Lighthouse Schools ("the ones we are learning from"). The focus of data review for these schools is looking at cohort data. The system has most recently purchased EduClimber as technology support to monitor the growth of all students. Administrators at the Lighthouse Schools have more flexibility in decision-making (evidence-earned autonomy).

In essence, the school system has re-energized its vision through increased levels of support and accountability.

The system ensures a positive future for its students by focusing on its greatest asset, the people. Assuring quality professionals in every position is a major focus of the district, and quality hiring practices, as well as effective induction, mentoring, and coaching programs, demonstrate this commitment. Critical to the success of any organization, particularly one whose focus is on the education of children, is the selection and preparation of the adults in the building. An interview with the system's human resource staff and with school leaders, the school's leader, and leadership teams indicated that a concerted effort is made to recruit teachers who have the background, skills, and attributes to support the system's mission. Human relations practices are powerful in getting the right people on board. The needs of the various schools are taken into account in recruiting, with an emphasis on placing teachers with specific skill sets in Horizon Schools and other areas of attention. Job fairs have been conducted both onsite and virtually. The system offers incentives to recruit candidates and retain teachers. There is also financial compensation for employees who refer candidates to the school district. A number of other incentives to entice quality candidates are defined in the system's Recruitment and Retention Incentive Plan. The Comprehensive Master Recruitment Plan includes such initiatives as Walk In Wednesday, specialty area job fairs, "grow your own" programs, and other opportunities. One focus under the direction of the Division of Human Resources is the spearheading of wellness activities as one way to ensure the retention and well-being of staff. The Division of Human Resources contributes to the system by meeting its expectations as defined in qualities of effective schools - recruiting and retaining the highest quality staff for all students by prioritizing staff effectiveness (Theme 3). The system also offers the DeKalb County Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (TAPP), a state-approved, two-year non-traditional route to teacher certification designed to meet the critical teaching needs of the county.

Focusing on people implies that relationships are important. A mentoring and coaching program is fully operational. Every new teacher to the school is assigned a mentor teacher and participates in the system's New Educator Team (NETwork). This program offers targeted professional learning for educators who are new to teaching or new/returning to the district. A feature of this NETwork is the monthly Teacher Induction Seminars that are provided by the Department of Professional Learning on the second Tuesday of each month. Information is provided regarding the nature and content of these seminars. During the interviews with 251 teachers in DeKalb County School District, new teachers were polled regarding their assimilation into their school and the system. Frequent references were made to the NETwork program. At the school level, new teachers found great support from their school-level mentors, their administrators, and their colleagues. Onboarding processes for new staff have been streamlined through a virtual platform that acquaints them with logistics and requirements for the hiring process to be completed.

Academic coaches in all content areas provide support for teaching and learning across the district. The work of these coaches is supported by the Coaching Playbook, which clearly defines expectations, protocols, resources, and guidance in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Academic coaches work with school leadership teams to develop and monitor a virtual data room that represents the progression of students' learning and ensures instructional decisions are data-driven. Academic coaches also provide collaborative planning guidance. Specific goals for the current school year aligned to DCSD Strategic Goals include the implementation of CSIP coaching actions to achieve performance measures, support the Effective Schools Framework, implement the academic coaching cycle with an emphasis on student-focused goals, and support professional learning endeavors.

The system and its schools are committed to and follow through in making sure that all staff have the training and skills to be effective. Professional development opportunities are frequent, specific, and targeted. Interviews with teachers indicated that they have the opportunity to participate in areas that they request. Leaders indicated that professional development opportunities are often delivered as a

result of information gained from classroom observations and teacher evaluations. The Division of Curriculum and Instruction provides a support plan for the instructional core, which outlines the various opportunities for such entities as schools, teacher leaders, specialized cadres, and tiered schools. An extensive Summer Professional Learning catalog provides information for faculty and staff about available opportunities and the process by which they can participate, and a Summer Coaching Institute is provided. Specific training is always available in the areas of testing, compliance, and specific training for the implementation of programs and initiatives. A concerted effort to gather data with respect to the impact of professional development on student learning will assist the schools in making wise decisions for future efforts.

Collaboration is valued and protected across the system. Specific times are set aside for faculty and staff to collaborate. Interviews with teachers and administrators indicate that this looks different across the campuses. School leaders have the autonomy to plan and implement collaboration according to their needs. Interviews further indicated that in some schools, collaboration was not as valued and did not have a structure that would support data review, review of student work, action research, or collective planning. Evidence review indicates that some system-wide professional learning communities are operating (Horizon PLC). Moving forward to achieve the system goals in the areas of staff effectiveness and culture/climate, some heightened accountability would increase the likelihood and more consistent implementation. This may be an area for further study in the regional support model. Administrators indicated that they frequently drop into such sessions. Topics may often be identified by the academic coach or other administrators for these sessions. Teachers who participated in collaborative planning communities found real value in the time to review student performance data, jointly plan, and provide training and feedback for each other. Given the variations across the district, it would be difficult to determine if collaboration as a professional activity is making an impact on student learning, teaching practice, or organizational effectiveness. Anecdotal information is readily available but not often recorded or gathered. The system is encouraged to take a regular pulse check by systematically looking at how collaboration is impacting student learning, teaching practice, and organizational effectiveness.

The system targets the development of quality leaders for now and for the future through formalized leadership development programs for parents, students, teachers, and leaders to assure sustainability and future success and further evidence of a growth mindset. The district provides several opportunities for adults to develop leadership skills for administrative positions in the district. Leadership academies are in place, including the superintendent's Principal Academy, Assistant Principal Academy, New Principal Academy, and the New Assistant Principal Consortium. Principals who are in the first three years of their leadership role engage in the Performance Coaching training program. Leadership development programs are also available for aspiring administrators, including the Aspiring Leader Academy and the LEAP Aspiring Principal Academy. These programs are a vital part of the district's principal pipeline and have as its goals to improve and streamline hiring systems, select and match qualified leaders with schools, make better-informed decisions about recruiting and developing leaders, track aspiring leaders, and assist with career planning and succession. The system has a partnership with higher education partners in the Equity and Innovation Fellowship for Leaders, where applicants are evaluated for participation by an external group. Power Fellowships are opportunities for teacher leaders. Student leadership opportunities include serving on the Superintendent's Advisory Council (school representatives), individual Student Councils, club offices, participation in various community service outreach projects, and ROTC programs. Parents serve on local Principal Advisory Councils (PAC), as PTA/PTSA officers, and as booster club officers. Regular PAC Cross-Council Meetings are held virtually to bring these individuals together as a collective voice. Numerous opportunities are afforded to parents to serve as volunteers and various school-based committees and organizations. Teachers have formal opportunities for leadership development in some of the district's formal programs but are also afforded many opportunities on the local campus, including grade

department chairs, team leaders, and service on various school committees, on the Principal Advisory Council, and in the development, implementation, and monitoring of school improvement plans. Some student interviews across the thirty schools visited indicated, however, that they did not feel that their voices were often heard and that they were not given opportunities for leadership. The system may wish to pursue more input from students in this regard to continue its mission to “ensure student success, leading to higher education, work, and life-long learning.”

The system ensures a growth mindset through its commitment to maintaining connections with instructional practice through formal supervision/evaluation processes and some implementation of various informal practices. DCSD employs role-defined evaluation systems based on employee groups to provide ongoing feedback to employees. These evaluation protocols are in line with expectations from the Georgia State Department of Education and include timelines prescribed for all aspects of these evaluations to be conducted, including orientation deadlines, final evaluation deadlines, and dates that the evaluations are to be submitted. Interviews with all of the system’s administrators indicated that less formal observations occur on every campus that focus on student learning and providing support for teaching. There appears to be a great deal of variation as to models, rubrics, feedback cycles, and impacts on professional learning decision-making. Administrators indicated that they were expected to spend at least one hour per day in classrooms. Academic coaches conduct regular classroom visits to determine the need for additional support. Teachers interviewed saw great value in these fewer formal visits and received feedback in varying ways, including notes, emails, and conversations. There does not appear to be a systemic format for these “walk-throughs” other than one for ESOL. Administrators indicated that sometimes these classroom visits were for an intended purpose (to observe a strategy or practice previously determined) or oftentimes to interact with students and get a pulse for learning across the campus. Regional superintendents often drop into schools and conduct classroom visits, particularly as a part of the progress monitoring program. To be able to get a systemic look at what instruction looks like across the district, the district may examine some uniformity of expectations and feedback processes in these fewer formal opportunities.

System staff demonstrate a strong commitment and aligned actions to meet the specialized social, emotional, developmental, and academic needs of individual students across the institution. The system has created opportunities for personalized, open, accessible, and equitable opportunities for all learners. Evidence is abundant. Artifacts included information about acceleration, project-based programs, and extensive offerings defined as the Diverse Educational Program Pathways. Offerings include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, STEM, dual language immersion, gifted program, magnet and theme programs, and many others. The district can boast of having 28 schools that have received the Cognia distinction of being STEM-certified and an additional two schools that are Georgia DOE STEM/STEAM schools. School choice system-wide affords parents and students the opportunity to select schools that meet their individual career and life goals. Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data-based problem-solving to integrate standards-based instruction, interventions, and assessments to address the full range of student academic and behavioral needs present in the classroom. MTSS encompasses all the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional demands of learning. MTSS is a key part of the broader DCSD strategic framework to support all learners and ensure equitable access to a robust, high-quality education. The system’s Equity and Student Empowerment Division provides curriculum and support for all schools in the areas of curriculum and instruction, speech and language support, coaching and mentoring, understanding least restrictive environment, providing assistive technology, full IEP (individualized education plan) implementation, data analysis, program standards, accommodations, and behavior support. Professional learning opportunities are provided for all staff and are available in an annually published calendar.

The school system celebrates diversity and ensures equity across all programs. DCSD students represent 155+ countries and 170+ languages. The system highlights several programs and initiatives that celebrate the richness that a diverse student population brings to the learning of all. The system's equity program prepares an annual report for all constituents. Opportunities abound in this area, including such programs and initiatives as the most recently launched Learning Hub at the Latin American Association (LAA) of Atlanta. This hub, similar to the district's Mobile Impact Learning Hub, is equipped with computers, information about colleges and trade schools, and more. This project is only one of the many projects that the district is engaged in, partnering with community organizations to provide new opportunities to marginalized students and families. The space is dedicated to helping students and families find a pathway to a university or technical school and exploring scholarship options. It is supported by a grant from The New Teacher Project (TNP), a national nonprofit that works with hundreds of school systems across the country. The system is encouraged to continue processes in place to review curriculum and instructional materials to ensure that they are in line with the district's clear appreciation of diversity. Embracing the cultural diversity of the community as a strength is captured in the system's Core Beliefs.

The system demonstrates and continues to practice a deep growth mindset that focuses on the well-being and social/mental health of everyone in the family. The system took its responsibility for educating all students, even in times of crisis, by quickly pivoting to an online environment during COVID-19 school closures. Interviews with administrators, system staff, and parents indicated that the system made sure students had devices (laptops, chrome books) and the necessary internet access to continue their learning. Communication between school and home was frequent and personal. The system provided technical support when needed. Teachers received the necessary professional development to be able to deliver instruction remotely. Upon the return to school, the system communicated regularly with parents. Parents interviewed indicated that they were pleased with the response of the system and the communication in place. Upon return to campus, health and safety measures have been taken and are maintained. Options are in place for students who need to quarantine or who, for some reason, cannot attend school. Interviews with parents and teachers indicate that important lessons have been learned during the pandemic that will impact schooling in the future. Parents, administrators, and teachers felt that communication between home and school was more frequent, and the flexibility of online conferencing allowed parents to participate at higher rates. The incorporation of new technologies into teaching practice is another blessing identified by teachers. Some parents commented on their renewed appreciation for the work of teachers after observing teaching at home on a consistent basis. Some teachers noted a renewed interest and eagerness to learn on the part of students now that they have returned to campus and engaged in a system-wide sensitive focus on the health and well-being of students and staff during remote learning and now back on campus. Formal social/emotional learning programs have been developed/implemented on every campus. The system defines expectations in its core beliefs that highlight the responsibility of meeting every student's academic, social, and emotional needs. System-wide programs to address social and emotional well-being and support include programs like My Brother's Keeper and My Sister's Keeper. My Brother's Keeper program was launched in February 2014 by Former President Barack Obama. The system re-launched this effort to be established in every one of its schools. The mission of DCSD's My Brother's Keeper Program is to ensure student success by supporting academic achievement, service, and mentorship for young men of color as they become productive citizens of this global society who will continuously give back to their community. The core values of the program are accountability, integrity, leadership, relationships, respect, pride, and service. The system also launched its My Sister's Keeper program in October 2021. In a most recent newsletter, the system superintendent commented, "My Sister's Keeper will allow our girls to engage in meaningful activities geared towards not only the enhancement of academic achievement but empowerment and self-care as

well. We are excited for the opportunity that this program will provide our young girls, and we cannot wait to see them soar!" The Family and Community Empowerment Division provides numerous opportunities to engage all families in training and classes. A most recent product of this division is the Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide to assist parents and caregivers with skills and tools to monitor their child's access to remote technology tools.

The school system provides a high-impact learning environment informed by rich data for all students. Classroom observation data and student performance data indicate that students are making gains in DeKalb County. COVID gaps exist, but the system is working hard to address those gaps. Administrators were asked during the interview process to describe learning environments on their campus. The Engagement Review Team was unable to conduct classroom observations during this remote review. Innovative practices were described by many, especially with the forced integration of technology to provide remote learning experiences for students. Instructional frameworks guide the curriculum work of teachers, and expectations are clearly delineated with respect to lesson planning and learning targets. Leaders, teachers, and parents have access to rich data about student learning. Parents can stay up with student progress through the parent portal, Infinite Campus. Across the system, research-based tools are in use for progress monitoring. Professional learning opportunities are provided to assist teachers in using these tools. Student growth is being measured across the elementary grades through the NWEA™ MAP® testing program (Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress), and teachers and parents spoke of its power in understanding and documenting student growth. Teachers interviewed indicated that they are provided the necessary training to interpret and analyze student performance data in ways that will impact their teaching practice. In addition to state-wide assessments (Georgia Milestones), data are also available regarding performance on PSAT, SAT, End of Pathways Exams, International Baccalaureate Exams, and a number of benchmark assessments. The system, in its efforts to be transparent, is in the process of developing and making available public Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Dashboards. The proposal has been developed, and a working group has been formed with support from a focus group comprised of internal and external representatives). An anticipated launch will be spring 2022 and is one of the initiatives instituted to restore public trust. Interviews across the thirty schools indicated that there were a variety of protocols in place to analyze data. Some were more formal, but in some cases, the responses indicated a somewhat casual approach to the implications that data provide. The system is encouraged to consider the development of a system-wide data analysis protocol that will assist teachers in reviewing the data they gather in ways that will enhance conversations and sharing in professional learning communities. It will also allow a more systemic look as to practice and further inform the development and implementation of quality collaboration structures system-wide. The team notes that some early investigation is underway with Data Wise with the potential goal of using that as the system's primary data literacy-cycle work.

The system maintains a strong strategic focus, intentionally allocating resources in line with the system's continuous improvement efforts. Protocols are in place for schools to seek funding for individual initiatives through a request process. Teachers, administrators, and some parents from most schools reported that the continuous improvement plans help drive resources. Interviews with the finance department indicate that specific protocols help to identify the allocation of resources. This survey process (Resource Allocation Methodology Plan/RAMP) collects data input from schools and regional offices for the next year's school-based resource allocation process. The district has initiated a new zero-based budgeting process. The general fund budget utilizes a line-item, zero-based budgetary approach. School budgets are developed in accordance with an approved allotment formula. Specific timelines are provided in the development of the budget. Each division aligns its operations and plans with the district's strategic plan. Data analysis is a vital component of each of these division plans. These

plans have been aligned with Cognia's Performance Standards. Facility assessment processes are in place as well.

Resource allocations across the district are perceived as inconsistent by various stakeholders. Interviews with parents indicate that they perceive some schools receive greater support from the district than others. Comments were frequently made regarding facilities and that there are varying levels of support for new construction and upgrades. Some indicated that the district provides curriculum resources for some schools, while others rely on PTA/PTSA to purchase these same materials. The Engagement Review Team suggests that a re-examination of resource allocation is needed to ensure and assure equity, and now is an appropriate time to engage in this activity, a "reset," as it were.

A comprehensive strategic plan provides the framework for a data-driven culture for decisions regarding academic and organizational programs and services, but full implementation of plan initiatives to ensure analysis of the impact of its plan on student learning and organizational effectiveness has not been achieved. A focus on the collection and analysis of selective data will assist the system in continuous improvement planning and will enable the system to answer the question, "How do we know that what we are doing impacts student learning?" As the team began the standards review process, it became apparent that BCPS would benefit greatly from collecting and analyzing data in several important areas. This data collection and analysis process will greatly aid in the development of a quality continuous improvement plan and support the institution's roadmap for the future. Interviews with teachers indicated that student performance information (both formal and informal) is available for them in planning for instruction. The school system must ensure that staff members clearly understand how to use and interpret data to change teaching practice and modify their instructional strategies to meet the needs of their varied students. Areas that should be reviewed by DCSD are clearly noted in the Standards Rating chart included in this report in the areas of Results (RE) and Sustainability (SU). Areas of note include the collection and analysis of data with respect to stakeholder perceptions, the efficacy of leadership development activities, the impact of teaching and learning on the beliefs and attitudes of the learners, the impacts of instructional monitoring, and professional development. Additionally, a review of technology's impact on student learning would be in order. The system is data-rich and has a collection process that culminates in tracking and dashboard applications. Interviews indicated that the analysis of data is a common practice among the leaders in the schools and at the system level. The team is suggesting that the selective prioritization of data collection sets for targeted areas identified above will help one to know what has been achieved to efficiently practice quality program evaluation and "strategic abandonment."

While schools analyze and use student learning data to verify individual student progress, processes to provide evidence of ongoing improvements to instructional practice are anecdotal and inconsistent across the district. The apparent lack of a consistently implemented district-adopted walkthrough protocol makes it difficult to look at the impact of instructional practice on learning. There does not appear to be a district-adopted instructional model that is aligned to a walkthrough tool. These are areas of further consideration by the system.

Each governing authority board member is highly committed to the district and the students, but board members are not working together collectively in support of the mission of DeKalb County Schools. Board members are elected to serve four-year terms and are elected one from each of the seven regions in the DeKalb County School District. This structure has the tendency to put board members in the position of being a "representative for my region." The team was very meticulous in discussing the roles and responsibilities of board members only with the board members themselves. No outside conversations were held. Support for various initiatives across the district was not consistent across the board member interviews.

Policy reviews and development occur as required. A review of policies in the policy manual indicates a consistent tone of boundaries and limits. As the board entertains revision or new policy, it would be most helpful to consider policies as the driving strategy for growth. Interviews further indicated that board members participate in the required training as board members provided in accordance with state requirements. Interviews indicated that board members stay abreast of what is happening in the district through communication from the superintendent and presentations to the board from schools. Weekly meetings occur between the superintendent and board leadership. Interviews with board members indicated that they receive weekly communications from the superintendent to keep them current, as well as receiving the weekly newsletter the superintendent produces for the system staff.

The board operates under policies with respect to a code of ethics, and each member acknowledges this commitment annually. Additionally, the board operates under Policy BAB with respect to culture and values. This policy states, “The Board dedicates itself to assuring a culture of collaboration, transparency, and continuous learning. The Board values open communication and input and prioritizes the best interests of the classroom as most important.” The board has most recently (July 13, 2020) approved the DeKalb County Board Member Handbook: The Unity of Purpose, Roles & Responsibilities, Norms, Agreements.

To sustain quality instructional programs and practices for all students system-wide, the team urges all members of the board to revisit and renew its commitment to the expectations as outlined in this handbook and in Board Policy BAB.

The school board engages in a regular system of self-evaluation. The board may wish to further examine a system of reflection that looks at the board as a whole, how it works in unity, and public perceptions. Board members must fully understand and appreciate the important role they occupy in school district governance, and the equal importance of acting within, not beyond, this role. It is incumbent upon every board member to set aside personal agendas and focus their efforts on governing together in the best interest of the school system. Change in behavior is ultimately the responsibility of each individual board member. While Cognia fully appreciates that board members can and will have differing opinions, Cognia’s governance standards expect board members to be professional and collaborative in resolving or moving beyond those differences, focusing primarily on areas of common interest and responsibility in service to the school system and its students. If board members embrace Cognia’s recommended practices, they are likely to find they enhance, not diminish, their ability to fulfill the significant responsibilities of their elected positions.

The team’s findings identified numerous reasons for celebrations. These celebrations exist because of the dedication and hard work of the leaders and instructional staff of the DeKalb County School District. The parents and students of DCSD are privileged to be part of a family that supports the development and success of the whole child. Much success has been achieved, and greater success awaits as the system continues its quest toward improvement. Aggressive strategies are in place and will take time to demonstrate impact. Strong commitment exists for these, and the team encourages the system to stay the course and consider in its implementation that they must “go as fast as they can, but as slow as they must.” Serious considerations of the information in this report, data (element ratings and Standard ratings), and suggestions for further study will support these efforts. Using tools provided by Cognia, including the Cognia Performance Standards with Key Concepts for Systems and the i3 rubric, in conjunction with the element ratings contained in this report for each Standard, will enable the institution to “inspire our community of learners to achieve educational excellence.”

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. W. Darrell Barringer, Lead Evaluator	Dr. Barringer's educational career spans 46+ years. On June 30, 2012, he retired from Lexington School District One in Lexington, SC, after working there for 34 years. During that time, he served as an elementary principal for 29 years and had the privilege of opening two new schools. He has taught grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and served as an assistant principal in addition to the principal role. He has also served with SACS (AdvancED/Cognia) since 1983, having chaired teams in more than forty-one countries as well as in the U.S. His service has included schools, systems, digital learning institutions, corporations, and Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. Dr. Barringer's B.A. is in biblical education from Columbia International University and his M.Ed. (elementary ed), his Ed.S. (administration) and Ph.D. (elementary ed) are from the University of South Carolina. Dr. Barringer joined the Cognia family officially on July 1st, 2012 as Director for AdvancED (Cognia) South Carolina. Dr. Barringer retired in September 2019 as vice president for volunteer services for AdvancED (Cognia) and continues to serve as a volunteer and consultant to Cognia.
Vinson Davis, Associate Superintendent for District Effectiveness	
Dr. Tama Freeman, Retired educator	
Dr. JW Good, Professor of Educational Leadership	
Rodney Green, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning	
Eddie Hood, High School Principal	
Kimberly Hunter, Assistant Superintendent of Middle Schools	
Dr. Tikki Middleton, Middle School Principal	
Burt Parker, Director of Technology	
Dr. Cheryl Reynolds, Professor of Educational Leadership	
Dr. Chara Willaford, Regional Leadership Coach, Governor's Office of Student Achievement	
Paul Sidney, ELA Department Chair	

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