McKenzie County School District

Waterford City, North Dakota

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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.

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

Learning Capacity Domain

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

Learning Capacity Standards											Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	3	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.										Improving
	EN:	4	**IM:**	3	**RE:**	2	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	2	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	2	**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.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	2	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	4	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**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:**	4	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	3	
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.										Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	3	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	3	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.										Impacting
	EN:	3	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4	

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:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Improving
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	2	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	

Resource Capacity Domain

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

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	3	
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	4	
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.									Improving
	EN:	3	**IM:**	3	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	3	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	2	**EM:**	3	
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4	
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	4	**EM:**	4	

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.	Impacting
	EN: 4 **IM:** 4 **RE:** 4 **SU:** 4 **EM:** 4	

Assurances

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

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

Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

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

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

Institution IEQ	350.65	CIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33

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.

Planning and conducting the McKenzie School District System Engagement Review was intended to gain as much information as possible to rate the Standards, review evidence, and engage all stakeholders in the accreditation process. The team offers the following insights that highlight themes across the organization and ideas for the next steps.

The system's commitment to its vision and purpose is implemented and ingrained in the culture and reflects shared beliefs about teaching and learning by all stakeholders. During focus group interviews, the leadership team's opening presentation, and review of documents, the Engagement Review Team learned that the mission "*Empower every student to succeed today and into the future*" permeates every aspect of culture and learning in the school system and community. The evidentiary review process and results from interviews of stakeholder focus groups confirmed a high level of system leadership. It was evident that the system was thriving and energized by a positive climate and a sense of hope that goals would be achieved as students become successful citizens. The culture of the system and its schools was described by various stakeholders using words such as "family, community, welcoming, supportive, caring, inclusive, dedicated, and progressive." The "Wolves Time" and the establishment of the "Wolves Academy" are two outstanding avenues that provide learners the opportunity to forge strong relationships with an adult advocate and support their educational experiences. The team suggests that the school continue this commitment of staff and time to embed and protect this vision across the system fully.

The governing board adheres to a code of ethics, functions within defined roles, and establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness. Through interview conversations with governing board members and administrators, as well as a review of evidence provided, the board adheres to and operates under a written code of ethics. Board members articulated to the team that members attend training to stay informed regarding current applicable laws, regulations, and best practices. Both district leadership and board members respect each other's roles and responsibilities. Evidence exists that policies and procedures are reviewed, although no scheduled plan was presented to the team. Interviews also indicate that board members have identified roles and are assigned to specific committees. Checks and balances tend to strengthen a system's operational effectiveness. The team suggests the system articulate a written plan for revising policies and procedures, which will formalize and strengthen an already strong relationship between leadership and the governing board.

Stakeholders demonstrate actions to engage in a continuous improvement process resulting in improved student learning and professional practice. The current strategic plan is a strong earmark

of the system. The plan was developed with input from stakeholders and guides the long-range planning of the system, is supported by the governing authority members, and uses the rationale of the Cognia self-study process. Information provided in interviews, discussions, and documents revealed that the strategic plan had been revised and adopted in the last year. The strategic plan contains specific priorities and goals, strategies to achieve the goals, and progress indicators to provide an analysis of achievements gained. These strategies and goals are research-based and exhibit qualities that apply to not only academic success but also the social-emotional complexity of our youth today. The newly implemented strategic plan is a strong, comprehensive, and wide-ranging plan. Although the plan is extremely strong, the critical initiatives identified to meet those objectives did not include specific timelines, metrics, or benchmarks for partial or final achievement. Evidence for each objective is listed, but anticipated attainment levels or indicators of success are loosely defined. Goals and initiatives that are specific, measurable, and time-bound are more likely to be achieved. Interviews indicated that not all stakeholders know or have access to data incorporated in the strategic plan. To move this system to a level of sustainability and embeddedness, leadership may want to capture and analyze relevant metrics that measure success. Analysis of ongoing surveys and inventories and the communication of the results of such surveys to all stakeholders may well be a priority strategy in the system's communication plan.

The system uses various types of assessments and gathers results with analysis to improve student learning. Many documents and artifacts provided to the team indicate that ongoing assessment is a common practice and expectation at the schools. Stakeholder conversations with teachers, students, parents, and the governing board members confirm the use of assessments within the school and across the district. It was reported that teachers and administrators regularly share assessment results with the various stakeholders. Some stakeholders commented that they receive test results at parent-teacher conferences. The discussion of data within the system is positively driving instruction. The systems teachers and interventionists meet regularly in professional learning communities (PLCs) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports. Evidence and interviews support that ongoing meetings are held to discuss test results and realign groups for intervention in the core areas of reading, mathematics, and science.

The elementary grades have adopted and implemented standards-based report cards and developed common assessments. All levels of the system have unpacked and aligned standards and created curriculum and pacing guides for core content areas. Evidence and interviews indicate that many students are able to articulate how formative and summative assessments are used in their daily instruction. Many students and staff shared that individual goal setting is an expectation in the system. To sustain and embed a culture of data-driven instruction that is creative, innovative, and student engagement, the team suggests the system continue to gather and analyze data that assesses the learning culture and the effectiveness of instruction over time.

The system supports a collegial atmosphere that values quality teaching practices. Working as a team to support student success is a high priority, as evidenced by interviews of all stakeholders. It is grounded in their goals and strategies, witnessed by their sustained analysis of student assessment data, and engrained in their expectation of data-driven instruction. Furthermore, the protected time in the weekly schedule for PLCs cements this educational practice. Leadership supports sound instructional initiatives through financial resources by engaging outside professionals to provide professional development training and continues to allocate time in the district schedule allowing teachers opportunities to refine their curriculum pacing guides and to develop effective learning strategies. The system incorporates its own coaching and mentoring program for new teachers and new teachers to the district. Interviews and evidence provided to the team support that a collaborative and collegial professional learning environment exists. While collaboration and collegiality are already strong

practices, the team suggests that the leadership massage these practices and relationships to maintain high-quality instruction.

The system develops strong ongoing alliances between and with community partners. Through interviews with community business leaders, school leadership, parents, and students, these relationships were evident. The system has an active network of community leaders supporting teaching and learning through activities and service opportunities. The current co-location of the community recreation building and the new technical skills center slated for completion is strong evidence of community and district collaboration. The school partners with the local business community to provide support for their extra-curricular endeavors. One of the strategic priorities for the system is social-emotional learning, and the system has recently added school personnel and teamed with the local health systems to provide support for families and students with critical needs. The team suggests expanding these partnerships by developing focus groups and pooling resources and professional expertise as the system looks to embed these foundational initiatives. Such a planning focus will cement the already strong collaborative partnership.

The team thanks the institution for its genuine engagement in the continuous improvement process and hopes that stakeholders use the insights from this review as they move forward in their continuous improvement journey.

Next Steps

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

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

Team Roster

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

Team Member Name	Brief Biography (Lead Evaluators Only)
Sandra Raines, Lead Evaluator	Sandy Raines is a retired elementary teacher from Divide County Elementary School in Crosby, North Dakota. Previously, she worked as a librarian/media specialist and as a Title I math and reading teacher in Divide County. Over the past 40 years, her professional teaching experience has ranged from early childhood to secondary education. Mrs. Raines has served on School Engagement Review Teams for several years.
Mike Bitz, Superintendent	
Rebecca Johnson, School Counselor	
Katie Saykally, Educational Strategist Coordinator	

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