



# Cherokee County School District

Canton, Georgia

**March 27-30, 2022**

**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

215134

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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:	4	RE:	4		SU:	3
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	4
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	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
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	3
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	3
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	4
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	3
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3		SU:	3
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	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:	2

## 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
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.						Improving		
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2		SU:	2
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3		SU:	3
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	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:	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:	3		SU:	3
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
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	4
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	4
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	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:	4
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	4

## 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:	4		SU:	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:	4		SU:	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:	4		SU:	4
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4		SU:	3
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.						Improving		
	EN:	3	IM:	4	RE:	2		SU:	2
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:	2	IM:	3	RE:	3		SU:	3
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.						Impacting		
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4		SU:	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:	

## 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 its 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.

<b>Institution IEQ</b>	<b>377.74</b>	<b>CIN 5 Year IEQ Range</b>	<b>278.34 – 283.33</b>
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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 its plans to continuously strive for improvement.

Given the restrictions for assembling, the review for the Cherokee County School District (CCSD) 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, to review the evidence, and to engage all stakeholders in the virtual process. Under the leadership of the chief academic officer, a robust and easily navigated system was provided to the team to allow them to access critical information about the system. In addition to having access to several documents, websites, and online sources, each standard was accompanied by a detailed narrative, a "story" of continuous improvement. This "story" provided the team a real feel for continuous improvement and the culture of the school system. 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. In summary, the Cognia Engagement Review Team engaged in quality information gathering sessions that included presentations by the superintendent, interviews with 373 stakeholders and a deep dive into 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 next steps.

Several powerful and impacting initiatives are underway in Cherokee County School District. All of them are promising amazing results. The team acknowledges that sustainability is demonstrated when programs and initiatives are operational long enough to provide metrics of success over time. As the system reviews the findings of the report, this may be reflected in some ratings concerning Results and Sustainability.

**The Cherokee 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. The Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs center on rigor, relevance, and relationships. These concepts are so interwoven into the fabric of the organization that they clearly define the culture. A culture is a group of people who behaves and sees themselves in relation to the mission. A culture is further defined by a set of customs and a unique language or communication system. Cultures are further strengthened in times of hardship and difficulty. The

system's mission is clear, and commitment to it 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. This purpose was recently renewed through a redevelopment of the system's strategic plan in 2019, referred to as the Blueprint. A community-based process was used to craft this plan. Assistance was provided through a partnership with the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement. Initial work began in a board retreat where the commitment was renewed that all stakeholders, internal and external, should be included to build commitment for its success and the success of the students across the system (most often referred to by stakeholders as "the county"). The six-month long development process included input in meetings with students, families, system administrators, teachers, support staff, and business/community partners. These committee meetings were well attended, and an additional community survey process was used with more than 2200 responses.

Engagement in the development of the Blueprint is one example of the level of stakeholder engagement in CCSD. Parents are encouraged to engage with their schools through service as PTA volunteers, PTA officers or elected School Council members. School Councils are comprised of parents, employees and business and community partners and provide a forum for concerns and a conduit for information to be shared with the school community. School Council members are called upon regularly to attend the Superintendent's School Council Roundtable to represent their schools. A strong partnership between the system and PTA has created a free Parent University with in-person programs that focus on varying issues of importance to parents. This Parent University was initially launched as one feature of the system's implementation of its Social and Emotional Learning initiative. Parent engagement is further demonstrated through their involvement with the Office of Curriculum and Instruction's process to establish the Instructional Framework for teachers to guide teaching and assessment practices. Meetings were held in each of the Innovation Zones (high school and feeder schools) for parents to learn and participate. Parents at the school level have multiple opportunities to engage with the school through such organized activities as "coffee with the principal," Curriculum Nights, Family STEM Nights, PE Nights, and school volunteer programs. Experienced volunteers can further advance their knowledge and involvement through participation in CCSD's VILLA (Volunteer Instructional Leadership Learning Academy) program, a parent academy pioneered by the system with support of the Georgia School Boards Association. This program equips parents with more expert knowledge about public education and the school system to further support their child in the educational process. This initiative is led by the school board and the school superintendent and received recognition from GSBA through a Leading Edge Award. The program has had seventy-four parent graduates since its inception in the 2016-2017 school year. Parents have further engaged with the school in having clarity about their child's performance and educational planning using the learning management system Canvas. This school year teachers have uploaded the coming week's lesson plans and resources on the weekend prior. Several parents interviewed indicated how helpful this was in keeping them informed and allowing them to interact with their children around their learning as it unfolds. The superintendent has organized several Ad Hoc Committees that provide opportunities for input from system leaders, school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, partners, and students. There are standing annual committees and more "task force" oriented committees to address specific needs. Information gained from these committees assists the superintendent in decision-making and forms the foundation for recommendations or proposals to the school board.

Business and community partnerships are solid and support the work of the system in achieving its mission and vision. Partners are such a vital component of the work of the system, that they frequently were part of the interview groups held at each school with the school's stakeholders. They were always well-informed and appreciate how the system has included them and how the system values what they bring to the work. These programs for partnership engagement have achieved statewide recognition and

duplication and have expanded beyond the typical Partners in Education (PIE) process. These partnerships are evident across the system and especially active with the various schools. These partnerships are in conjunction with the local Chamber of Commerce and through CCSD's program called Companies that Care.

Feedback from surveys is seen as a vital component of continuous improvement and includes input from students, employees, parents and families, business and community, and the community at large. Focus groups and surveys informed the work and development of the Blueprint and are a vital part of its metrics for success. Survey data informs the work of professional learning and other initiatives in support of the goals of the Blueprint. The recent implementation of Parent Square, an app notification system for parents that includes attendance, grade notifications and secure assessment data, as well as bus routing updates, came about from survey information. Surveys inform the work of the Office of Human Resources in improving its recruitment and retention efforts. An annual student survey provides information regarding the social and emotional needs of students (Panorama). The system employs its own surveys that are deployed systematically. Culture and climate survey data reviewed by the team indicates that parents and students are cared for and support the work of the system.

Engaging stakeholders also requires the commitment to keep them informed and up to date. School system communications consistently earn praise from stakeholders and through accolades from state and national professional organizations including three consecutive top honors Golden Achievement Awards from the National School Public Relations Association.

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. Cherokee County School District is a "we" place where stakeholders feel strong ownership and affinity to the system and its purposes. Before the team's remote arrival, 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." 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. Advocacy programs are in place across the school system, with specifically designed times for this to occur at all levels. Morning Meetings at the elementary level are a powerful way to assist in meeting student needs, reinforcing the system's Core Beliefs and promoting student leadership, health, and their ability to be self-advocates. 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.

**Continuous improvement in Cherokee County School District is a robust, inclusive, formalized process that engages and enlists the input from stakeholders.** The Blueprint, established for the 2019-2024 school years is rooted in the vision of "Together, we will prepare the emerging generations to confidently rise up to limitless learning potential and success." (Referred to in the system logo as "educating the emerging generation. ") The goals of the plan are supported by a set of core beliefs which capture the system beliefs and commitments. These statements clearly define what must be believed to achieve and include beliefs and outline that "we believe in a growth mindset, as every student can learn, achieve, and thrive; the meaningful connections we forge with students, families, and community partners positively influence show e teacher, lead, and prepare graduates for success in a knowledge-based, technology-rich and culturally diverse world; and safe, welcoming and inclusive schools are critical for successful teaching and learning and strengthening our culture of belonging, kindness, and possibility." The core areas addressed in this Strategic Plan (referred to as the five Priority Areas)

include Student Achievement: Access and Opportunity, Organizational and Operational Effectiveness, Family, Partner and Community Engagement, Positive Culture and Climate, and Quality Workforce. The expected outcomes for these core areas have the intended result of producing graduates as defined in the system's emerging Profile of the CCSD Graduate. For each Priority Area, system senior staff set performance objectives that map out implementation and measures of success. Decisions about the metrics are rooted in defining metrics that can provide specific data points to demonstrate growth and improvement (impact). For example, in Student Achievement: Access and Opportunity, the measurable expectations all are focused on teaching and learning with measurable expectations for learners. A "progress report" is presented to the CCSD Board annually with the first report being delivered in 2020. This annual evaluation process affords the opportunity to revise goals and update metrics as appropriate. These goals from the Blueprint inform School Improvement Plans (SIP) designed annually at the school level by school principals and leadership teams. These plans are further informed through engaging teachers and parents at each school site and are formally approved by the school board. CCSD's Office of Communications provided oversight of the Blueprint development process and ensures stakeholder awareness through an annual progress report called the Blueprint Report Card. This campaign also includes the responsibility for posting the Statements, Core Beliefs and Priority Areas on the system website, all school websites and as well as having it posted in all facilities. Interviews with system leaders and with all the board members (7) indicate that the Blueprint is the driving force for all decision-making in the system as defined by board policy (BA: Goals and Objectives), for development of the annual budget. All organizational leadership team members are held accountable to the expectations outlined in the Blueprint through an annual evaluation process tool called the Blueprint Evaluation Instrument (BEI). This tool is used for the individual's initial, midyear, and annual performance reviews and is another indication of the Blueprint's embeddedness in the system's culture.

**Cherokee County School District demonstrates and continues to practice a solid growth mindset that focuses on improving teaching and learning for all, demonstrated by leadership that is visionary, transparent, accessible, and compassionate.** Interviews across the system indicate that the leadership team at the central office are valued, open, and are frequently seen in the schools and community. Several parents interviewed remarked about the visibility of the superintendent who is seen not only at school events during the day, in the evenings and on weekends, but also seen in community events. Board members are frequently out in the community, and even though most of them represent a regional part of the country, clearly understand their roles to be "one voice." The team interviewed all seven board members and concluded that much success for students occurring in the system is due to their support and the leadership of the superintendent. Sustainability of efforts is enhanced when leaders are in place for a period. All the current board members have at least eight years of service to the system and the superintendent has been on board for six years. The implementation of the Blueprint to its fullest capacity is enhanced by these stable and thoughtful leaders. The board understands its role in reviewing and revising policy. A national codification system is available online of school board policy with accompanying information regarding adoption dates and revision dates. A recent enhancement, in keeping with the school board's and school system's shared mindset of continuous improvement, has been the incorporation in the policy manual of relevant guidelines and other important documents as noted attachments. The superintendent and cabinet annually review all 161 policies in a process coordinated by the chief of staff. This review is to align policy with legislative actions or changes in State Board of Education rules, federal laws, or internal practices. The update is presented to the school board for review in advance with the two public readings offered as required by law.

The consistent commitment of the school board in their efforts to achieve the mission and vision of the school system has been recognized consistently over the past four years by the Georgia School Boards Association with recognition in 2018 as a Quality School Board, in 2019 as a Distinguished School

Board, in 2020 as an Exemplary School Board, and most recently, in 2021 as the Governance Team of the Year.

**Clearly defined processes and procedures guide the work of the system and promote clarity of expectations to achieve the mission.** 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 system. 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. Evidence review by the team indicates that these guides are reviewed and updated regularly based on feedback from various audiences. Particularly meaningful and of great impact is the *Instructional Framework: A Guide for Teachers and Leaders*. This tool is critical to the implementation of teaching and learning in the system and was referenced frequently by leaders, teachers, system support and the instructional lead strategists across the system. This is the catalyst for the development and maintenance of a curriculum based on high expectations and guides teachers in the development of powerful and engaging lessons. Standard operating procedures include such plans in areas like technology (*A Future Ready Blueprint for Technology Use*), facilities, and budget processes. The online *Principal's Handbook* is an invaluable resource for providing support for school principals in every area under their supervision and is updated monthly. Its online format provides ready access to information, templates, guidance, tools, and support to support them in effective leadership practices.

**The system maintains a strong strategic focus, intentionally allocating resources in line with the system's continuous improvement efforts and the Blueprint.** 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. The process collects data input from schools and regional offices for the next year's school-based resource allocation process. The system uses multiple long-range planning tools to assist with strategic resource management and assure alignment with Blueprint and strategic goals. The Annual Budget Committee provides a transparent and collaborative process for input. Annually the system updates its tools to support the process which includes the Blueprint, Five-Year Facility Plan, Three-Year Technology Plan, Five-Year Budget Forecast and Ten-Year Demographics/Enrollment Projections, Capital Outlay/Bonding Plan, and Fifteen-Year Debt Service Plan. The Five-Year Budget Forecast provides the basis for decisions concerning all aspects of teaching and learning. The process allows for input to be considered to determine how the bottom line will be impacted. The system operates on a 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 system's strategic plan. Data analysis is a vital component of each of these division plans. Facility assessment processes are in place as well.

Resource allocations across the system is perceived as inconsistent by various stakeholders. Interviews with parents indicate that they perceive some schools receive greater support from the system than others. Comments were frequently made regarding facilities and that there are varying levels of support for new construction and upgrades. Some indicate that the system 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 would ensure and assure equity and that now is an appropriate time to engage in this activity, a "reset." Perceptions are often harder to change especially with varying levels of support (Title One).

The system has a stellar reputation for fiscal stewardship over many years and works diligently to maintain that reputation. Regardless of the economic situation in Georgia or in the county, the school board annually adopts a balanced budget with focused key allocations of resources to provide services to maintain and promote student academic achievement. The CCSD Annual Comprehensive Financial Report provides transparency in financial practices and information for all stakeholders.

**The Cherokee County School District ensures a positive future for its student by focusing on its greatest asset, the people.** Assuring quality professionals in every position is a major focus of the system, 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 Division of Human Resources (DHR) staff and with school leaders, and leadership teams indicate 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 considered in Job fairs conducted both onsite and virtually. CCSD, through the efforts of the DHR has been able to be 99% staffed on opening day for the past three years. They have been able to retain teachers with only a 7% attrition rate (compared to Georgia's 11% attrition rate). CCSD has multiple university partnerships targeted to fill the needs of the system areas. One partnership, in its early stages of development with Kennesaw University, Call Me Mister program, engages black male potential teacher candidates to participate in field experiences in the system. Student interns are given a laptop and access to the same online tools that their certified mentor uses. All recruitment teams for Job Fairs are trained on best practices for hiring and interviewing based on the book *The Ideal Team Player* (Patrick Lencioni) and are given questions that target specific areas that are valued by the system. The system has identified its own need to recruit a workforce that is more similar to the population served and actively works in this arena. The team encourages this to be a priority in the recruitment and hiring process.

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 Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). Newly hired teachers are provided with the Curriculum and Instruction Orientation prepared by the Division of Curriculum and Instruction and facilitated by the Professional Development Department. The NTIP program outlines a multiyear framework for the support and retention of teachers new to the profession by offering services and resources that improve their understanding of sound pedagogy and effective instructional practices. They are paired with a qualified mentor who meets the system Mentor Job Description and accountability logs are maintained. Instructional lead strategists and academic facilitators also provide school-based support meetings. During interviews with 84 teachers in Cherokee County School District, new teachers were polled regarding their assimilation to their school and to the system. Frequent references were made to the NTIP Program by both teachers and leaders. 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.

Instructional lead strategists (at every school) and academic facilitators in all content areas provide support for teaching and learning across the system. The work of these coaches is supported by the CCSD Coaching Handbook, which clearly defines expectations, protocols, resources, and guidance in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Instructional lead strategists (ILS) also provide collaborative planning guidance.

**The system and its schools have 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 could participate in areas that they request. Leaders indicate that professional development opportunities are often delivered because of information gained from classroom observations and teacher evaluations. Employees have access to professional development and career ladder opportunities through the support of the CCSD Professional Development Plan 2020-2024. To ensure that teachers and leaders are fully engaging with the system's Instructional Framework, system-created professional learning courses are provided through the learning management system, Canvas. This coursework allows for the ILS to provide consistent and recurring training around the Instructional Framework to ensure consistency in implementation and a clear understanding of expectations. Professional staff maintain professional learning goals in the Blueprint Evaluation process. Access to the catalog of the available professional learning experiences is provided online using PowerSchool's Professional Learning (PL). School-level professional development is through professional learning communities and site-based support through workshops as described in school improvement plans and supported by training and instructional coaching by the Instructional lead strategists and academic facilitators. A continued and concerted effort to gather data concerning 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.** Frequently heard across the interviews in CCSD were the words “refresh” concerning professional learning communities. PLC training began in SY 2016-2017 with the expectation that all teams meet weekly, set norms, and collaborate to improve teaching and learning using relevant data. Data team protocols were added the following year to ensure a focus on evidence-based decision-making. In 2020-2021, the refresh included a focus on stronger and deeper student-centered conversations about learning. Over 650 PLC facilitators as well as all principals, assistant principals and ILS were trained. New teachers are also provided training on PLCs and the protocols in use systemically. Coaching tools for PLC effectiveness are provided for the PLC facilitators with support from a PLC guide. Accountability and impact are assured by the maintaining and sharing of minutes from each meeting. Follow-up surveys conducted in September 2021 indicate high success rates in the refresh initiatives and renewed value attributed to the PLC model. Specific times are set aside for faculty and staff to collaborate. 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. The system is encouraged to continue 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 superintendent communicates monthly through a newsletter called “Cardinal Directions,” which is a compilation of articles on leadership that he has read and sees as aligned with CCSD's mission. The Innovation Lead Principals Program provides annual opportunities for one principal from each zone to speak on behalf of their peers in regular meetings with the Office of School Operations and the superintendent. The system provides several opportunities for adults to develop and enhance leadership skills CCSD personnel. Leadership academies are in place including the Superintendent's Teacher Leader Academy, Superintendent's Leadership Academy (I, II, III, IV, V), Superintendent's Leadership Academy (focused on Leadership Coaching Endorsement), the Superintendent's Athletic Leaders Academy (I, II), and most recently the adding of a complementary program called the Executive Coaching program for current school and system administrators seeking to improve their leadership skills. These programs are a vital part of the system's principal pipeline and have as the 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. Parents and families are encouraged to take on leadership roles in their schools and in the system. Every school maintains a School Council with leadership opportunities. Every school maintains a PTA or PTSA unit that offers parents many options for leadership. To encourage student leadership at all levels, CCSD offers opportunities in all schools for students to serve through character education community service-learning initiatives, student government, clubs, and extracurricular activities. Student leaders are valued, and their input is valued. Student Advisor and Student Delegate to the School Board Programs afford them this opportunity.

**The system ensures a growth mindset through its commitment to maintaining connections with instructional practice through formal supervision/evaluation processes and implementation of various fewer formal practices.** CCSD 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 the system's administrators indicate that less formal observations occur on every campus that focus on student learning and providing support for teaching. Administrators indicated that they were expected to spend as much time as possible in classrooms. Instructional lead strategists and academic facilitators conduct regular classroom non-evaluative 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. 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. Engagement in the Blueprint Evaluation process ensures that all employees set goals and targets specific to the implementation of the Blueprint. These goals are the foundation for midyear and end-of-year conferences to determine progress and set goals for subsequent years or to determine the needs for professional development. During the time spent in the system, numerous references were made to monitoring processes that occurred to ensure consistent implementation of the Instructional Framework with such terms as "Clarity Walks" and "Fidelity Walks."

**The CCSD 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, Chromebooks) 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 consistently. 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 captured in the system's CCSDCares Program. The system defines expectations in its Core Beliefs that highlight the responsibility of meeting every student's academic, social, and emotional needs. A CARES team meets monthly with the participation of social workers, resource officers, and in some cases, the registrar to discuss the social and emotional needs of students.

Morning meetings are implemented system-wide at the elementary level where lessons are planned to provide students multiple opportunities to grow and develop socially and emotionally. These morning meetings are opportunities for role modeling, social awareness, and lessons on life-long skills. These conversations are rooted in the CARES language (Cultivating Achievement, Resiliency, and Empowering Students) with a focus on restorative practices.

**CCSD delivers a targeted focus to achieve student success.** Classroom observation data and student performance data indicate that students are making gains in Cherokee County. Administrators from every campus 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. The Instructional Framework guides the curriculum work of teachers and expectations are clearly delineated concerning lesson planning and learning targets. Leaders, teachers, and parents have access to rich data about student learning. CCSD's assessment program is primarily based on the required Georgia Milestone Assessment System (GMAS), a state-based, summative criterion reference series of assessments at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in core content areas. Several other assessment instruments and protocols are used across the system to identify areas of strength, to identify students who need enrichment, or support from various programs across the system. The school system provided to the team a deep analysis of student performance over time as measured by a variety of instruments. In every case, these data indicate that students are performing at high rates and making great progress. As a global indication of impact, CCSD's graduation rate is at its highest (90.82%), which exceeded the state average and the average from the previous year. The graduation rate has increased by 15 points since 2012. Data concerning students attending colleges in Georgia indicate that 97% do not need any remedial support.

Parents can stay up with student progress through the parent portal, Canvas. Across the system, research-based tools are in use for progress monitoring. Professional learning opportunities are provided to assist teachers in using these tools. Teachers interviewed indicate 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, and several benchmark assessments.

Foundational to student success has been (and will continue to be) the continued development, implementation, and monitoring of CCSD's Instructional Framework. To truly prepare graduates for life after CCSD, the Instructional Framework and developing Profile of a Future Ready Graduate were utilized to develop focused a high-expectations and focused curriculum. The development of this critical foundation for success used teacher leaders in a multi-year project building teaching and learning maps. The "blueprinting" process was developed to bring teachers together from all Innovation Zones to develop the Teaching and Learning Map that provides thematic direction organized around "what is being taught" and "when is it taught." This blueprinting process has been implemented with several courses system-wide and is an ongoing project. These maps and Focus Standards are accessible to teachers through the Curriculum Portal online. CCSD created its own ELA (English/Language Arts) curriculum using Larry Ainsworth's *Rigorous Curriculum Design* (RCD). This process identified priority standards in each unit and a structured scenario with four tasks. Currently, enhancements and

advancements of all grade-level units are in progress. RCD units are intended to be living documents that will continue to be reviewed and enhanced. RCD is the foundation for all ELA curriculum for all levels. This clear direction for instruction is guiding the work of the ELA program system wide. A similar focus on mathematics will ensure equally amazing results.

The Instructional Framework (captured in CCSD Blueprints) provides a standards-based curricular framework for all teaching and learning. The Teaching and Learning Maps are shared by content coordinators and are used extensively in the schools' professional learning communities. Teachers use the Focus Standard documents to design instruction focused on the Learning Targets and Success Criteria. Working with the ILS, teachers incorporate best practices to differentiate instruction. The Strategic Plan Blueprint provides the foundation for PLCs to use the Instructional Framework as they collaborate to design and plan teaching and learning.

Students with specialized learning needs have robust processes to identify their needs including a Student Support Team (SST), Response to Interventions plan (RtI), services for students who qualify under 504 as well as strong support for students with disabilities being served under IDEA. Specialists are available to serve the varying needs including teachers, administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists and school nurses.

**Innovative integration of digital resources is not systemically demonstrated in CCSD.** Interviews with teachers and leaders indicate that the use of technology to enhance learning has increased in some instances due to its use during remote learning experiences. During the presentation at the beginning of the review, the superintendent indicated that a next step for the system would be the investigation and further development of its blended learning model. As a first step, he indicated that the system would expand professional development to make these skills both mastered and put into routine use by all educators. Ensuring skills and access/resources is critical to meeting the vision of the system and creating a Future Ready Graduate. The system is not currently a 1:1 system. The system has 41,000 machines and some schools have 1:1 programs. The system maintains and tracks inventory and maintains a five-year Instructional Technology Plan, technology staff training programs, and a Business Technology Long Range Plan. CCSD supports true integration into teaching and learning through seven instructional technology specialists (ITS). They are certified Georgia educators whose primary job function is to ensure professional development on digital resources is provided, the tools are appropriately and effectively utilized, and teachers understand when they are appropriate to support instruction.

The school system initiated the use of Cognia's eleot (Effective Learning Observation Tool) which measures student learning in seven environments. Based on 78 observations, the score for the digital learning environment overall was 1.88 (Cognia average: **1.79**) with similar scores in each of the three indicator areas.

CCSD recognizes the need for attention in this area and has created Blended Learning Coaching Cohorts which are partnerships of teachers and ILS/AF to learn together and implement instruction that models the CCSD Instructional Framework. Through a partnership with the International Center for Instructional Leadership (ICLE), coaching of the partnerships has begun.

The Engagement Review Team encourages the system in its quest to improve access, integration, and innovation of digital resources to achieve its vision of "educating the emerging generation." Further development and implementation of the Profile of a Future Ready Graduate will have great implications for developing and implementing a robust 21<sup>st</sup>-century Instructional Framework.

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 Cherokee County School

District. The parents and students of CCSD 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 for 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 “educate the emerging generation.”

## 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)
<p>Dr. W. Darrell Barringer, Lead Evaluator</p>	<p>Dr. Barringer's educational career spans 47 years. On June 30th, 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, 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 41 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 BA 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 of 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.</p>
<p><b>Jennifer Haygood, Associate Lead Evaluator, Elementary Principal</b></p>	
<p><b>Dr. Cordaryl Middleton, K-8 Principal</b></p>	
<p><b>Dr. Christina Tucker, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction</b></p>	
<p><b>Dr. Tiffany Weaver, Middle School Principal</b></p>	
<p><b>Dianna Weinbaum, Senior Director, Cognia</b></p>	

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