# Douglas County School System

**Douglasville, Georgia**

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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 |

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# 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:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 4 | |
| **1.2** | Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning. | | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 4 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 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:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 3 | |
| **1.4** | The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 4 | **IM:** | 3 | **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. | | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 3 | |
| **1.7** | Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning. | | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 3 | |
| **1.8** | Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction. | | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 4 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 4 | |
| **1.9** | The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 4 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 4 | |
| **1.10** | Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement. | | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 4 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 4 | **EM:** | 3 | |
| **1.11** | Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency. | | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 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:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 4 | |
| **2.2** | The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 4 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 2 | **EM:** 3 | |
| **2.3** | The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | **EN:** | 4 | **IM:** | 4 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 4 | |
| **2.4** | The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 2 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 4 | |
| **2.5** | Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 3 | |
| **2.6** | The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 2 | **SU:** | 2 | **EM:** 2 | |
| **2.7** | Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 3 | |
| **2.8** | The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 3 | |
| **2.9** | The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 2 | **EM:** 3 | |
| **2.10** | Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 2 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** 3 | |

| Learning Capacity Standards | | | | | | | | | | | Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2.11** | Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to the demonstrable improvement of student learning. | | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 3 | |
| **2.12** | The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning. | | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | **EN:** | 3 | **IM:** | 3 | **RE:** | 3 | **SU:** | 3 | **EM:** | 3 | |

## Resource Capacity Domain

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

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

| 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:** 3    **SU:** 3    **EM:** 3 | |

# Assurances

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

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

# Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

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

| **Institution IEQ** | 334.19 | **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 its plans to continuously strive for improvement.

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The Engagement Review Team for Douglas County School System has identified several themes that support the institution's continuous improvement process. These themes present strengths and opportunities for growth to help guide Douglas County School System's continuous improvement journey and organizational effectiveness efforts.

**The system has created a culture of collaboration and empowerment among stakeholders.**
Douglas County School System (DCSS), located in Douglasville, Georgia, serves approximately 26,000 students; the system is the state's seventeenth-largest system. Although it is considered a large school system, its leadership and staff were praised by stakeholders because they shared how the system had worked very hard and diligently to create a culture of collaboration and empowerment among stakeholders. The system leaders engage stakeholders by using parent, teacher, student advisory committees, and community stakeholder groups to gain insights or recommendations regarding key strategies to continue to move the system forward. During interviews with the team, several stakeholders acknowledged that the system has been strategic in thinking and planning to implement methods for representatives from all stakeholder groups to provide feedback and insights into the system's continuous improvement model and its overall purpose and direction. It was evident that intentional efforts to ensure stakeholder engagement and feedback were essential components related to the system's success. As the governing body for the system, board members expressed the importance of stakeholder engagement being a vital part of meetings and other events throughout the system to freely reveal, share, and expound on the information. One board member stated, "We have realized that it is important to collaborate and work together in Douglas County Schools. Our stakeholders know they can talk with the superintendent and us if they have concerns. They know that we are open for their feedback." Many stakeholders shared that these proactive actions had created a healthy culture of a collaborative partnership between them and the system and a strong alliance for supporting the purpose and direction of the system.

In addition, throughout interviews, other stakeholders shared their experiences regarding how the system collaborates and empowers them to help shape and guide the system's continuous improvement efforts. For example, quarterly meetings are held with faith-based leaders and during all meetings, the goal is to get information or guidance when planning for the system's needs and its overall success. During an interview session, a faith-based leader shared with the team how the system has established a collaborative relationship among stakeholders and how the system's leadership has empowered them to be part of the system's team to support the overall success of Douglas County School System. The stakeholder added, "We are very grateful that the superintendent has established this relationship." Other community members echoed the same sentiments regarding the system's sense of empowerment

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and the collaborative working relationships with stakeholders throughout the system. This process seems to have been embedded into the system's fabric and culture, according to interviews with staff members and the students as well.

The system uses *Pulse*, an online survey platform, which provides critical data points related to the culture and climate across the system. During the Overview of the Improvement Journey with the team, the superintendent shared how informative the data are from the program about giving the stakeholders a "voice" regarding the system's overall success. In addition, the system has designed its website as a resourceful tool for parents with an abundance of resources and information. Parents and community members can easily stay engaged by using the system and schools' websites to access current information related to its strategic goals and other components of its continuous improvement model. Efforts to empower parents to support the success of their students at home include having access to Infinite Campus, opting in for text alerts that bring awareness to grade performance, Google Classroom, which allows them to monitor assignment completion as well as upcoming assignments, and feedback from teachers that is helpful to parents as they assist their learner.

Based on interviews with community and business partners, it was apparent to the team that there was a longstanding, collaborative partnership between them and the system. It was obvious to the team that community and business partners have been engaged and empowered to be part of the system's decision-making process regarding key functions related to how they could support student and system success. Stakeholders shared with the team that students have multiple opportunities to gain experience to become productive members of society once they leave high school through workforce development initiatives and other activities.

**Board governance is a strength of the system.** The Douglas County School System Board of Education members have established a collaborative relationship to support and assist with the guidance of the system's strategic direction. Stakeholder interviews revealed a culture of collegiality and shared leadership between the Board and system leadership with open lines of communication, which created mutual trust and respect among all the board members, leaders, staff, and external stakeholders.

Interview data confirmed that the Board engages in developing policies for the system and ensuring adherence to the policies once they are developed and approved for governance and oversight. In addition, during interviews, stakeholders commended the Board for supporting and helping guide the purpose and direction of the system. One stakeholder's comments echoed the sentiment of others, "Our Board puts students first, and they know how to work together for the good of our system. If you attend our board meetings, it is easy to see that we have a great Board." From a review of various recorded board meetings by the team, it was evident that the Board consistently exhibited ethical behavior and decorum during its meetings. Members of the Board also participated in ongoing professional learning beyond the Georgia Statuary Requirement to stay current and informed about effective practices related to the roles and responsibilities of a school board. The Board was one of a few within the State of Georgia that was recently recognized by the Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) for its achievements throughout the year and efforts to create a "culture of good governance and student success," earning the distinction of "Exemplary Board" for Douglas County School System.

**System leadership focuses on successful outcomes.** During the opening presentation by the superintendent and his leadership team, it was apparent to the team that a focus had been placed on developing and implementing a continuous improvement model that emphasized the importance of successful student outcomes within the Douglas County School System. In addition, through the process of reviewing the evidence presented by the system, listening to the comments made during stakeholder interviews, and examining essential components of the school system's website and strategic plan, the

team found substantial evidence of a strong and comprehensive planning process used to produce systemic focus and direction within the school system to support personnel and student growth. The system developed its continuous improvement model that acts as its strategic improvement plan, which is a research-based framework developed by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). The comprehensive framework consists of the following components:

- Vision, mission, and belief statements
- Performance data
- Strategic goal areas
- Strategic priorities
- Performance objectives
- Measures and targets
- Initiatives
- Action plans

The community and different stakeholder groups were also included in this thorough process, which resulted in widespread ownership and support for system and school improvement to enhance student success.

In addition, the system has developed and widely disseminated a clear and concise strategic plan that demonstrates the link between important goals and objectives to help guide the system's continuous improvement efforts. Based on stakeholder interviews, Douglas County School System staff and external stakeholders seemed well-versed about the purpose of the plan and how their work or support is vital to the overall success related to the system's ongoing continuous improvement efforts. They made comments that indicated the work is important, such as the following, "We must continue to work together for the success of our system, but most importantly, the success of our students." Therefore, the plan's impact, as well as the process used to design it, has been described as systemic. Student performance is the focal point for the system and is encompassed in each goal and performance area of the five-year strategic plan.

**Stakeholders are united through the system's shared vision.** The superintendent and the system-level executives emphasized the importance of strong, visionary leadership. They all have established a definite priority in their mind and remain committed to the educational system's mission and vision. The visionary leaders collaborate effectively with the Board of Education, system and school personnel, community members, and parents. During interviews, stakeholders shared that even though the Douglas County School System faced challenges due to the Coronavirus, it still found a way to stay focused and come together as a community to put students first and provide them with the education and support they needed to be successful.

The collaborative relationship that system leadership has established with stakeholders contributes to a caring culture that encourages collaboration and communication. At the system level, the entire administrative staff was described as a leadership team that works well together and is very accessible to stakeholders. All conversations with internal and external stakeholders revealed the necessity of developing relationships. Furthermore, the leadership team's proactive and consistent communication efforts have resulted in meaningful stakeholder participation and a sense of widespread ownership and investment among stakeholders and the community to support the system's purpose and direction,

resulting in a sound culture of a collaborative decision-making process among all stakeholders throughout the system.

**The system emphasizes data-driven decision-making and uses multiple sources of data to support its continuous improvement journey.** Based on interviews and the review of documentation by the team, it was determined that Douglas County School System is committed to developing and implementing research-based best practices to support and guide its continuous improvement efforts. The system leadership showcased the importance of ensuring their continuous improvement model, which includes developing the strategic plan, operations improvement plans for each department, and a school-wide plan, as the essential instrument to guide and monitor improvement efforts. From there, the system pinpointed how data are used to inform improvement planning and the evaluation of programs and practices within the system. The internal stakeholders have started focusing on assessing the processes, procedures, and protocols in place to determine strategies to improve learning for all students. Multiple sources of data are used to support initiatives in math, science, social studies, and English language arts. System leaders identified improvement goals based on data to ensure alignment with the mission and vision statement. In addition, the system collects and reviews performance data to identify current outcomes and measure improvement in each strategic goal area. During the review of the evidence, the team found that the system's curriculum, instruction, and assessment information and processes are aligned to support organizational effectiveness. According to the stakeholder interviews, teachers can collaborate regarding student performance data to determine the next steps for immediate learning during their professional learning communities. While the system has implemented processes to monitor the quality and fidelity of implementing the adopted curricula, based on interviews and the review of documentation, the team encourages the system to revisit this process to ensure that it is being fully implemented, effectively, within all schools throughout the system.

The system ensures that it shares its annual report with all stakeholders. This information contains data from each department. Results of the strategic plan are clearly communicated to all representative internal and external stakeholder groups using multiple media formats such as texts messages, social media, and electronic mail. From interviews with the stakeholders, it was evident that there is a strong commitment to the success of the strategic plan throughout the system. Although the system is "data rich," the team suggests that a more formalized plan for analyzing and using data will continue to strengthen and sustain the system's efforts to use data to drive instruction and decision-making regarding continuous improvement and organizational effectiveness. Also, based on interviews of internal staff members, results of data need to filter down to the classroom teachers. In the last two years, a Strategic Research Department has been developed to examine data more closely and align it to the system's plans. This department is key to increasing the availability of longitudinal data. The team encourages the system to continue collecting longitudinal data from student performance and organizational effectiveness to determine progress toward achieving improvement goals and increasing efforts to become a model system to highlight the importance of creating a "data culture" to champion student success, educator effectiveness, continuous improvement, and organizational effectiveness.

**The system uses effective strategies to guide the system's purpose and direction.** To ensure consistency regarding support for the purpose and direction of the system, Douglas County School System has worked to embed its vision, mission, and beliefs throughout many aspects of system initiatives and activities related to student success and the overall organizational effectiveness of the system. From the review of documents and interviews conducted by the team, it was clear that the system used various effective strategies to provide opportunities for all stakeholder groups to create and build a sense of commitment to the system's purpose and direction. Some strategies included the use of surveys to garner feedback from stakeholders regarding the purpose and direction of the system as well as town hall meetings with stakeholders. In addition, the system's use of its website to provide

stakeholders with readily available and timely data and information was also considered a quality resource tool by stakeholders to provide updates and key information related to the success of the system. The superintendent also credited the formation of and regular participation in the advisory councils, comprised of students, teachers, and parents, with fostering open communication. Stakeholders used phrases like "progressive," "strategic," "analytical," "visionary," and "pursuing excellence" to convey their support for the school system's leadership because of the use of effective strategies to communicate and drive the purpose and direction of the system.

**Practices to ensure that curriculum and instruction and use of data to support teaching and learning are not consistently and effectively monitored throughout the system.** Extensive research in educational leadership exists that informs educators that providing school-based administrators with prescribed or high-quality, ongoing professional development has had a significant impact on student achievement. The review of supporting documents and stakeholder interviews indicated that building and growing leader capacity in Douglas County School System is an ongoing priority of the system's senior leadership team. During the Overview of the System's Improvement Journey, the superintendent shared multiple examples of strategic initiatives that clearly substantiated the system's goal of using data to support teaching and learning throughout the system, displaying the system's continuous improvement model as an essential vehicle to guide this work.

While the team commends the system's leadership for its ongoing efforts to develop and implement a research-based continuous improvement model to improve student outcomes and support educator effectiveness, the system is encouraged to focus on coaching for performance to ensure principals can use the information and guidance from system-level meetings and that these practices are operationalized throughout all institutions within the system. During interviews with school staff members, the team noted that, at times, a disconnect exists between the system's expectations and its schools regarding a clear and concise process related to how to document and consistently use data to monitor longitudinal results to demonstrate students' success about the development of creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. The system could consider the following to strengthen its current practices:

- reexamining the process to systematically monitor and document the use of data to improve teaching and learning within the system's schools to ensure that this process is systemic and embedded throughout the system.

- expanding leader development that focuses on research-based best practices and strategies to monitor, measure, and document the effectiveness of programs and other educational resources used to support learner success.

- providing ongoing differentiated professional learning to support educators regarding the importance of longitudinal results that demonstrate student success related to creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.

- ensuring that emphasis is placed on the importance of sustaining and implementing effective instructional, behavioral, and assessment practices throughout all institutions in the system.

- providing guidance and support and developing structures to make certain that all instructional staff understand the importance of their roles and responsibilities regarding the curriculum and hold each other accountable for its consistent application across all classrooms and content areas. Plus, use longitudinal data and evidence to monitor teaching and learning to support and monitor student outcomes and educator effectiveness.

While Douglas County School System has developed and implemented strategies to ensure the system has effectively employed methods to capture data using multiple measures, at times, the team found

limited evidence that the system used longitudinal data to drive change and improve instructional processes. The team suggests that strengthening this process through the Strategic Data and Research Department can help execute the vision for data analysis and use of findings to demonstrate and attain the desired results or outcomes at all levels throughout the organization. Again, the team recognizes that the Douglas County System does an excellent job reiterating the mission and vision of the school system. The team concludes that the system can consistently demonstrate growth and improvement over time as a next step by strengthening this area.

## 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.

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## 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 | |
| --- | --- |
| **Dr. André Harrison, Lead Evaluator** | Dr. Andre` L. Harrison currently serves as the Vice President of Accreditation Services for Cognia; he is serving his 30th year in the field of education. Prior to serving in his current role, he served as Senior Director for the Central Region (Midwest, Southeast Territories) for Cognia, a Regional Director for Advance Education (AdvancED)/ Measured Progress Southeast Region, and as the Alabama State Director and Lead Evaluator for AdvancED. Andre is also a member of the Auburn University College of Education National Alumni Council where he currently serves as the Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee. Before joining AdvancED, he served as superintendent, chief of staff/deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, principal, teacher, and library media specialist for the Elmore County Board of Education in Wetumpka, Alabama; he also has more than 25 years of experience as an adjunct university instructor. He is currently serving as adjunct assistant professor of Educational Leadership for the University of Alabama. Andre' has a passion for supporting institutions during their continuous improvement journey. His areas of expertise include educational leadership, board governance, finance, human resources, and school improvement. |
| **Dr. LaToya Doby-Holmes,** Accountability and Strategic Waiver Officer | |
| **Dr. LaRonda Fleming,** Director of Federal Programs | |
| **Mr. Michael Horton,** Principal | |
| **Dr. Marissa Prather,** Director of Middle Schools | |
| **Dr. Andrea Scandrett,** Director of Federal Programs | |

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