



# Northern Cass School District

Hunter, North Dakota

**November 1-4, 2021**

**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

**259465**

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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	EM:	
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:	3	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
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:	4	EM:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
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	EM:	

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	

## 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:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
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:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
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:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
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:	3	EM:	

## Resource Capacity Domain

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

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
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:	3	EM:	
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
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:	
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	

Resource Capacity Standards											Rating
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	3	
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:	2	EM:	3	

## Assurances

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

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

## Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

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

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

## Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs, and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, with examples of programs and practices, and suggestions for the institution's continuous improvement efforts. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team's deliberations and analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution organized by the levels of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The narrative also provides the next steps to guide the institution's improvement journey in its efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on its current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

The Cognia Engagement Review Team identified six themes as a result of proceedings, evidence, and deliberations to support the continuous improvement processes of the Northern Cass School District. These themes reflect the system's many strengths, including its courageous commitment to improvement and its dedication to providing a world-class education. Themes also include acknowledgment of the transformative work in progress at the time of the review and encouragement to continue pursuit of the system's identified goals. The system has conscientiously progressed in utilizing student performance benchmarking data and has defined several key longitudinal measures to inform decisions. Themes identifying opportunities for continued study include consideration of systematic solicitation of perceptions regarding wellness, work-life balance, and climate and formal review of the district's induction and mentoring programs to ensure efficacy. The Engagement Review Team offers the themes in this narrative to provide input and guidance as the system plans its next steps on its remarkable improvement journey.

**The system is actively committed to improvement that includes the bold, courageous transformation of teaching and learning and school alignment with current research and best practices.** A review of the system's informative website identified this transformation as a "Call to Greatness" for all stakeholders. The system has identified its "Why" as "We believe every learner can change the world; therefore, we will provide a world-class education." Replacing the more traditional mission statement with a "Why" brings the system's work to personal levels. Each educator also posts his or her own individual "Why" outside his or her learning center. The values of the system include purposefully building trust, developing authentic relationships, and engaging in innovative practices. The publicly stated collective commitment of the district to support and actualize the "Why" includes building relationships, training and learning, self-reflection, acknowledging greatness, and service to community. An epithet of the system was reported as "Brave before perfect."

The system's commitments and values have been supported through processes and practices developed, established, nurtured, and resourced by the district's leadership and operations staff. A review of evidence and interviews with board members and system leaders highlighted the collaborative working relationship established between the superintendent and the school board. The system website stated, "A team above all – above all a team." This teamwork was evident in documents from and references to retreats held in 2017 and 2021 to establish and review the district's commitment statements. The community has been surveyed frequently and strategically to ensure support and provide input to the board's actions. Interviews with board members and district leaders confirmed the

collaborative planning and common understandings reached by the board and administration for ensuring a world-class education. The board reviews the commitments and beliefs at every meeting. A thorough review of the strategic plan occurs annually.

The system's leadership meets monthly to document progress toward increased levels of competence as a participant district in High Reliability Schools (HRS), a rigorous program of innovation and improvement. The system has participated in the Marzano High Reliability Schools™ program since the 2017-18 school year. Northern Cass has been certified at Level One (Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture), Level Two (Effective Teaching in Every Classroom), Level Three (Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum), and Level Four (Standards-Referenced Reporting). At the time of the review, Northern Cass School District was the only school district in the nation to have attained an HRS Level 4 designation, and it has begun to work toward Level 5. The system created a crosswalk between HRS and the Cognia Standards as the district prepared for the Engagement Review. Illustrating implementation of the system's commitments and beliefs were records of over 3000 Greatness Cards sent to students and educators, implementation of the Wellington Survey, empathic interviews, K-12 standards-based grading, an annual "safety net" exercise, addition of a student as a non-voting member of the school board, implementation of common language, and multiple grants sought and awarded to support the system's work. The system has also funded the hiring of specialist positions to support its transformative work, including a director of personalized learning, a personalized learning coach, a director of college, career and life resources, a shared family case manager, and a site coordinator to assist in the transition to a full-service community school.

The board and system leaders have actively engaged to ensure the system's policies and board practices are current and support the system's commitments. The board's teaching and learning committee reviews all policies within a three-year cycle. The system's business director has reviewed all operational policies recently, and website access to a detailed elementary handbook and additional forms for all levels provided evidence of standard operations. The system's technology policies are delineated in a handbook, and technology use is an expectation. The system utilized an online mathematics program, and educators routinely upload lessons and units to the learning management system. Students access technology using individual devices, and the system provides training and support through a director of technology. The director capitalizes on the skills and practical knowledge of learners and educators to work together to provide support and inspiration.

At the time of the review, leadership and the board were reviewing and revising all position descriptions in order to reflect the expectations of the district's direction and to assist in the inclusion of incentives, such as micro-credentialing. The board is a member of the North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA) and has been called upon to assist in policy creation and revision for that organization. Northern Cass School Board members complete NDSBA training and are expected to engage in additional training annually. New board members also meet with the superintendent to review and sign ethics statements. The board sets goals and determines norms annually at its winter retreat. The determined norms are read at each meeting.

Opportunities to participate and lead in continuous improvement work are provided throughout the system for educators, learners, community members, and families. Opportunities include a parent advisory committee, staff advisory council, learner leadership committee, micro-credentialing for educators, the Teacher Leadership Academy, professional development, instructional rounds, multiple task forces, and ad hoc committees and incentives to conduct action research. The superintendent sends notices weekly to all constituents listing opportunities to become involved. All stakeholder groups were provided opportunities for input on the system's current strategic plan, and staff are provided multiple opportunities to request resources.

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan is comprehensive, includes resource management, and is reviewed annually at the board's winter retreat. An operational plan for each year is constructed. The operational plan includes benchmarks and delineates responsibilities, timelines, and clearly measurable outcomes. Progress on the operational plan is reviewed at each board meeting. The superintendent began a practice of delivering a state of the district address and plans to continue to do so bi-annually in the future. The system solicits feedback regularly from all constituent groups systematically through multiple channels.

Continued conscientious and comprehensive communication and longitudinal analysis of the effect of innovations will assist the system in moving forward, building transformed, world-class educational pathways for all learners.

**The system has actualized personalized instruction to prepare learners to become choice-ready.**

When asked to describe the district, one parent stated, "Everyone wants to be part of our community," and the others in the focus group immediately agreed. When learners were asked to sum up their experience at school, words chosen included: "fail forward," "don't settle," "collaborating," "use our own expertise," "work as a team," and "push yourself," as well as "amazing" and "indescribable." The system's Portrait of a Learner includes the Call to Greatness and five pillars: accountability, communication, adaptability, leadership, and learner's mindset. These pillars are conscientiously taught and assessed throughout the learners' progress through the academic standards, culminating in a capstone project. Throughout each learner's time in the system, an individual academic plan, co-constructed by educators and the learner, identifies goals and benchmarks and records progress. Learning and proficiency of the system's priority standards are measured according to calibrated rubrics. This shift to mastery learning has required many changes in thinking, preparation, and delivery of instruction. As one recently transferred student told the team, "It's really different here. I actually have to understand the content rather than memorize. It's harder and frustrating, and I love it."

Remarks recorded in interviews with educators and students and a review of evidence aligned with the system's stated strategic themes of choice-ready, evidence-based decision-making, personalized learning, and stakeholder engagement marked the personal pathways provided for each child. Each learner in the system has an individualized education plan outlining goals, benchmark data, and reflections on progress, which they review daily and share with their parents/guardians, and families.

Leaders highlighted the system's twin goals of provision of access and support for every learner. Providing access to what learners need via curriculum delivered through multiple means, including digital, pace-adjusted, multi-modal, and recursive as appropriate, has driven the development of divergent pathways to achieve proficiency in consciously identified priority standards across all academic areas. Support for learners has been provided in many forms, including digital access to instruction, multiple forms of assessment, choice bands, calibrated rubrics for priority standards, and instructor-designed learning centers based on the needs of current populations.

In addition, the system has provided educators with support staff, including a site coordinator who communicates and coordinates with families and a personalized learning director who can assist in planning the delivery of personalized instruction. Partnerships with North Dakota State University and Junior Achievement have provided interns and frameworks for instruction in social-emotional learning that have been co-taught in classrooms by educators and counselors throughout grades K-6 and aligned across curriculum in grades 6-12. Interviews with counselors, leaders, educators, and learners aligned with evidence indicating integration of job shadowing, ACT preparation, strategic group counseling sessions, and academic assignments' development of learners' skills, opening possibilities for future planning. As one educator told the team, "You just have to first and always love these kids. Thinking

about their futures is hard but helping them get ready to make educated choices is something we can and should do.”

The system has also committed to ensuring that relationships are foundational to learners’ educational lives. The system employs four counselors, with one specifically focused on careers, continued education, and life after high school. Each year, staff participates in a “safety net” exercise to ensure no learners are without adult advocacy and that all are included in the “Jaguar Family.” Learners begin to identify interests in elementary school, and all learners are expected to engage in community service prior to graduation. Many students participate in internal and external internships and job shadowing. Educators provided multiple examples in evidence and interviews of projects that were grounded in real-life, cross-curricular situations. The system tracked over 400 college credits earned by learners through Arizona State University during the 2020-21 academic year.

Educators follow the progress of individual learners in learning centers, consult with learners, and meet with other educators through the system’s professional learning community processes. During meetings, educators utilize the results of some large-scale assessments as well as curriculum-embedded measures to identify reinforcement and enrichment opportunities. Learners are provided with multiple options to show their learning throughout their courses, and educators administer surveys at the conclusion of courses to solicit feedback. System leaders collect notes from professional learning community meetings. Learners’ families have access to the learning management system and their learner’s priority standards’ progress. Educators expressed that professional learning community time was valued, especially by those who had common assignments.

Continued calibration of scoring using rubrics designed by system educators and ensuring effects of innovations are measured longitudinally will add validity and reliability to the impressive data gathered from the work of the system throughout its transformative processes.

**Leaders and educators throughout the system have increased the use of learner performance and perception data to inform decisions.** Review of professional development offerings, professional learning community norms, priority standards’ rubrics, survey results, large-scale assessment results, notes, and interviews with educators, learners, and system leaders provided evidence of a nurtured, developed culture of data employed to ensure learners’ progress. The system has invested time and resources to incorporate data into planning next steps for individual learners and for groups of learners. Educators meet weekly in teams to focus on learners’ needs, following established norms. Educators can request access to individual learner’s data collected through the system’s multi-tiered system of support for academics and behavior, results from large-scale norm-referenced assessments, and rubric ratings assigned relative to priority standards. Also available are overall survey results, and each educator conducts surveys with learners following each unit of study. Learners keep their own data and goals in their possession for reflection and determination of future pathways. Across the system, data indicate that gaps are closing and that student performance in mathematics is rising. Professional learning community notes are submitted to principals weekly and are returned with comments. Educators spoke highly of the processes and expressed growing confidence in the utilization of data to inform decisions relating to the provision of specialized services, choices for assessments, most appropriate instructional options, and open discussions regarding alternative methods. The weekly meetings have often led to educators visiting others’ learning centers to observe and collaborate. Educators solely responsible for a subject area noted a lack of common calibrators and collaborators but expressed gratitude for options to visit and connect with like professionals outside of the system. The system provides incentives for educators to conduct action research. Staff meetings begin with the sharing of gratitude statements, often followed by a round of educators sharing the state of their individual professional growth.

Ensuring a continued balanced assessment system with the capacity to produce reliable data to analyze trends and calculate comparisons will provide the district with evidence of effect for all constituents. Consolidation of continuously updated searchable, sortable data sets available to educators for specific populations or individual learners could add valuable insights by query to inform decisions.

**Collection of key metrics to provide growth information over time has become embedded in the strategic and operational plans of the system and will bring longitudinal insights to decision-making.** Review of the system's strategic and operational plans and interviews with members of the board and leaders clearly identified measurable benchmarks and well-constructed goals that have been designed to be monitored throughout the life of the plan. The system has boldly chosen to transform its schools to align with research-based best practices, and the changes have been supported by the community served. However, as one educator stated, "We have seen a whole lot of good and a lot of pushbacks." As the system continues to move forward, monitoring the effects of innovation over time will be helpful to inform next steps and pace of change. As per the strategic plan, data collection and analysis demonstrating the efficacy of the system's continuous improvement processes and resource allocations can build trust and provide added transparency. The system's curriculum revision and processes that demonstrated alignment with standards made clear connections between the schools and expectations. Initial calibration of scoring using rubrics for priority standards provided clarity and increased reliability of the system's standards-based grading.

As the system moves forward, continued calibration, revision, and re-alignment of rubrics, standards, and curriculum will increase reliability and clarify criteria. Institution of systematic follow-up of graduates could also provide valuable insights regarding the efficacy of the system's work.

**The system has signed commitment statements from staff to support improvement initiatives and has provided strategic coaching and support to educators and students; however, formal cycles of review of standard operating procedures, including systematic, systemic anonymous solicitation of stakeholder feedback regarding climate, wellness, and work/life balance, were not in evidence at the time of review.** Interviews with educators were overwhelmingly positive toward the transformational work of the district. Educators, parents, staff, and leaders expressed pride for the momentum and direction of the changes implemented. However, some concern has arisen regarding students who have not yet exhibited proficiency but have moved along with their age groups. Standard operating procedures regarding these students were unclear across all subject areas at the time of the review. A review of evidence and interviews indicated that the system employed multiple surveys to inquire about perceptions regarding digital learning, professional development, instruction, and other topics. Surveys regarding staff climate, work/life balance, or wellness were not presented.

Determination of data to be collected that can reliably inform procedures, processes, and programs and solicitation of perceptions incorporating anecdotal and anonymous feedback as well as performance data can contribute to sound and valuable reflection.

**The system has an induction process in place; however, coaching and mentoring for new instructors appeared as informal and not uniform, resulting in gaps in preparation and support.** Review of evidence and interviews with educators and leaders identified common induction training consisting of three days at the beginning of the school year. During this time, new educators began working with the learning management system, were introduced to the unique, progressive philosophy of the system, learned to use the system's rubrics rather than letter grades, met their colleagues, found and established their learning centers, familiarized themselves with curriculum, and began to employ the common language of the system among other expectations. The system utilizes the state's model for new educator training and has hired a personalized learning director and coaches. New educators were assigned coaches, but the coach assignments did appear to be fluid, as coach/mentors were not

consistent. Although monthly professional development and weekly “check-ins” were relatively systematic within a framework of gradual release, the topics discussed were not common. New teachers reported being helped a great deal by their colleagues if they taught in a grade level or in a department. Those teaching courses without partners did not have access to such mentorship. Special educators reported gratitude for the shared services provider assistance. New educators interviewed were both proud and overwhelmed to be part of the system. Some found it difficult to construct rubrics or employ standards-based grading in practice. Some encountered challenges in managing learning centers with learners at many stages of standards’ mastery. Others reported obstacles with the learning management system and with moving instruction to hybrid modalities. None reported being asked to provide feedback as to induction or mentoring effectiveness.

To assist in issues of retention and maintaining work-life balance, formal review of the system’s induction and mentoring programs may provide insight and increase efficacy.

The Engagement Review Team has submitted the findings included in this report after deliberations based on review of documents, analysis, and virtual interviews conducted across the system’s constituencies, with the purpose that these findings may prove helpful as the system continues its progress forward. The team was impressed by the system’s dedication, energy, sincerity, heart, and the brilliance of those they met. The team was inspired by the system’s commitments, beliefs, and courage. As Northern Cass School District continues to move forward, continued analysis of performance and perception data collected over time can be helpful in making informed decisions. In addition, formal evaluation of induction and mentoring may also provide guidance as this remarkable school system continues on its inspiring journey to answer its call to greatness.

## 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 professional experiences. All Lead Evaluators and Engagement Review Team members complete Cognia training and elect certification to provide knowledge and understanding of the Cognia tools and processes. The following professionals served on the Engagement Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography (Lead Evaluator Only)
<b>Dr. Julia Williams, Lead Evaluator</b>	<p>Julia Williams, Ph.D., is a professor emeritus of education at the University of Minnesota Duluth. She holds a doctorate in educational leadership, a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction, and a B.S. in secondary English education. Her areas of specialty include assessment, continuous improvement processes and planning, and program evaluation. She is a licensed secondary principal and district superintendent. Dr. Williams’ research and publications include studies of schools and the integration of leadership, staff development, student achievement, and supervision. She has served as primary investigator and as an evaluator on grants awarded by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Over the past 25 years, Dr. Williams has served as Lead Evaluator for well over 100 reviews for schools, systems, digital schools, corporations, corporation systems, and other protocols across the Cognia organization. She had been a member of the Minnesota State Council for many years and received the Excellence in Education Award for the state in 2013. She has served as a member of the Commission on Schools and serves as a Cognia Lead Evaluator Mentor for systems, schools, and corporations.</p>
<b>Sarah Beck-Connot, Business and Technology Educator, Maddock Public School, ND</b>	
<b>LaLynda Blotsky, Middle/High School Principal, Mayport-Clifford-Galesburgh, ND</b>	
<b>Stephanie Nilson, Pre-K – 8 Principal, Valley-Edinburg Public Schools, ND</b>	
<b>Dr. Jill Olson, Principal, Century Primary, Grafton, ND</b>	

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