



# Taylor County Schools

Butler, Georgia

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**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

215183

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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 will be organized by the Levels of Impact within i3: Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The organization of the findings is based upon the ratings from the Standards Diagnostic and the i3 Levels of 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 stakeholders are engaged in the desired practices, processes, or programs within the institution. Implementation is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are monitored and adjusted for quality and fidelity of implementation. Standards identified within Initiate should become the focus of the institution’s continuous improvement journey to move toward the collection, analysis and use of data to measure the results of engagement and implementation. A focus on enhancing the capacity of the institution in meeting the identified 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 represent 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 (minimum of three years). Standards identified within Improve are those in which the institution is using results to inform their continuous improvement processes and using results over time to demonstrate 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 the culture of the institution. Institutions should continue to support and sustain these practices that are yielding results in improving student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

## Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal to leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research-based standards, the 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 Cognia 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. Using these Standards, Engagement Review Teams 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 Cognia’s Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity** and **Resource Capacity**. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors. The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

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

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

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

### Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution’s progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution’s leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction; the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives; the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and

productive ways; and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning including the expectations for learners.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	2	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Initiating
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	1	SU:	1	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:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	3	EM:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	1	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	1	SU:	1	EM:	
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Initiating
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	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.	Initiating
	EN: 2 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 1 EM: 1	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Insufficient
	EN: 2 IM: 1 RE: 1 SU: 1 EM: 1	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.	Improving
	EN: 3 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 2 EM: 2	
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.	Initiating
	EN: 3 IM: 1 RE: 1 SU: 1 EM: 1	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Improving
	EN: 4 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 1 EM: 2	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.	Initiating
	EN: 3 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 1 EM: 2	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	Initiating
	EN: 2 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 1 EM: 2	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.	Initiating
	EN: 3 IM: 2 RE: 2 SU: 1 EM: 1	
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	Improving
	EN: 3 IM: 3 RE: 2 SU: 2 EM: 3	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Initiating

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating	
	EN:	2	IM:	1	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.										Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	1	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.										Initiating
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	

### 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.										Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.										Initiating
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	1	SU:	1	EM:	2	
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.										Initiating
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.										Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	1	RE:	1	SU:	1	EM:	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:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	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.										Initiating

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating	
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	2	Initiating
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.										
	EN:	1	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	1	EM:	2	

## Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® Results

The Cognia eProve™ Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot) is a learner-centric classroom observation tool that comprises 28 items organized in seven environments aligned with the Cognia Standards. Classroom observations are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes. Trained and certified observers take into account the level of embeddedness, quality, and complexity of application or implementation; number of students engaged and frequency of application. Results from the eleot are reported on a scale of one to four based on the students' engagement in and reaction to the learning environment. In addition to the results from the review, the average results from all reviews for the previous year are reported to benchmark your results against. The eleot provides useful, relevant, structured, and quantifiable data on the extent to which students are engaged in activities and/or demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and/or dispositions that are conducive to effective learning.

The insights eleot data provide an invaluable source of information for continuous improvement planning efforts. Although averages by eleot Learning Environment are helpful to gauge quality at a higher, more impressionistic level, the average rating for each item is more fine-grained, specific and actionable. Institutions should identify the five to seven items with the lowest ratings and examine patterns in those ratings within and across environments to identify areas for improvement. Similarly, identifying the five to seven items with the highest ratings also will assist in identifying strengths within and across eleot Learning Environments. Examining the eleot data in conjunction with other institution data will provide valuable feedback on areas of strength or improvement in institution's learning environments.

eleot® Observations		
Total Number of eleot Observations:		43
Environments	Rating	2018-19 Averages
<b>Equitable Learning Environment</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>2.82</b>
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	2.79	2.34
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	3.49	3.30
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.51	3.45
Learners demonstrate and/or have opportunities to develop empathy/respect/appreciation for differences in abilities, aptitudes, backgrounds, cultures, and/or other human characteristics, conditions and dispositions	2.65	2.18
<b>High Expectations Environment</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>2.71</b>



<b>eleot® Observations</b>		
<b>Total Number of eleot Observations:</b>	<b>43</b>	
<b>Environments</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>2018-19 Averages</b>
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.98	2.74
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	3.07	2.95
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	2.72	2.43
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	2.67	2.67
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	3.00	2.78
<b>Supportive Learning Environment</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>3.15</b>
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful	3.35	3.07
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	3.21	2.97
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	3.28	3.24
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	3.42	3.34
<b>Active Learning Environment</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>2.71</b>
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.88	2.77
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.53	2.41
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	3.21	3.12
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	2.56	2.45
<b>Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>2.63</b>
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	2.67	2.43
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	3.05	2.93
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	3.14	2.90
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	2.58	2.25
<b>Well-Managed Learning Environment</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>3.20</b>
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.56	3.42
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.56	3.35
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	3.42	2.89

eleot® Observations		
Total Number of eleot Observations:		43
Environments	Rating	2018-19 Averages
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	3.19	3.15
<b>Digital Learning Environment</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>1.79</b>
Learners use digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	2.30	1.97
Learners use digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	2.00	1.79
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.47	1.61

## Assurances

Assurances are statements 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. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus. The IEQ is comprised of the Standards Diagnostic ratings from the three Domains: 1) Leadership Capacity; 2) Learning Capacity; and 3) Resource Capacity. The IEQ results are reported on a scale of 100 to 400 and provides 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 the Initiate 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 AIN institutions evaluated for accreditation in the last five years. The range of the annual AIN IEQ average is presented to enable you to benchmark your results with other institutions in the network.

Institution IEQ	255.32	AIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33
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## Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, examples of programs and practices and provide direction for the institution’s continuous improvement efforts. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team deliberations and provide information about the team’s analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution from the levels of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide next steps to guide the improvement journey of the institution 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.

Taylor County Schools is at a critical point in its improvement journey. After a period of instability in its leadership, there is a sense from many stakeholders that the district is now moving in a positive direction. Below are some themes and suggestions that may help the district continue to move forward.

**Taylor County Schools has, in recent years, made notable improvements in leadership, learning, and resources.** The board of education has used its policy-making and oversight roles effectively to shepherd the district through a period of leadership transition, as attested by numerous stakeholders in interviews. In 2018, district leadership engaged the community in a guided process to clarify the district’s mission and vision. A new strategic plan has been developed to support the mission and vision, and evidence from leaders and documentation indicates that the plan is guiding the work of the district in a more robust way than had been the case in the past. Longitudinal data show the support of business and community partners for the work of the school district. Many reforms in district operations have taken place, though, as noted below, much work remains to be done. There is evidence from interviews, school visits, and documentation that an effort to align instructional resources with strategic goals is in progress; this has included efforts to evaluate instructional materials and software to determine continued use. Probably most significant has been the implementation during the current school year of a research-based K-6 literacy program, with new materials and ongoing training and coaching taking place. The foundation for professional learning communities has been established as well. Supervision of staff to improve monitoring of curriculum and instruction has been ramped up under the current central office leadership.

Some of these initiatives have already had positive impacts in classrooms, as is evident in the elect data from the review. Nonetheless, it is too soon to say that these initiatives are embedded throughout the district culture. Longitudinal data on most of the changes are not yet available, many of them having been implemented for two years or less. The challenge to leaders is to make these positive changes truly systemic, sustained, and embedded in the culture of the district. Below are three additional themes for the district to consider as it moves forward in its improvement journey.

**Strong purpose statements have been collaboratively developed and hold promise for uniting stakeholders and driving the work of the district.** The district’s five-year strategic plan, with its four areas of focus and associated objectives, may be used as the roadmap to achieve the mission and to bring the vision to life. The plan is posted for public view, and progress toward goals can be tracked

through an online platform used by many school systems in Georgia. With the strong mission and vision and measurable strategic goals in place, two suggestions for continued growth include (1) ensuring that all schools are conversant with the district goals since some schools were aware of their own mission and vision but appeared to be rather dimly aware of those of the district; and (2) ensuring that robust indicators to assess progress towards strategic goals are in place, beyond the current “yes/no” that appears in some parts of the improvement plan. For example, if the mission of the district is to ensure that all students graduate college and career ready, more specific connections between district and school actions and the goals could be included. Additionally, articulating specific ways that schools and central office departments contribute to college and career-readiness might ensure that more stakeholders have a role in supporting the mission. Tracking students’ plans after graduation, as well as graduates’ perceptions of how well-prepared they were for college and/or careers, would also be worthwhile areas for research.

The district has also invested resources in addressing the social and emotional needs of students as part of its effort to achieve its mission. While attention has been given primarily to students with demonstrated need, no district-wide process for ensuring that all students have an adult advocate or advisor is in place. Student interviews revealed that there are insufficient opportunities for all students to engage in ongoing advisory activities, particularly at the high school. There are job descriptions for support personnel, but inadequate evidence of a cohesive approach toward addressing each student’s needs. There is also a lack of data to determine the impact these support personnel are having in schools. This considerable investment to support students’ social-emotional needs may be viewed as an opportunity to improve the alignment of resources with the district mission and the strategic plan. Such actions may help address the concerns expressed by parents, community partners, and central office staff, regarding the challenges of addressing the needs of large numbers of students coming from impoverished homes. This is also evident in the district’s current Comprehensive Needs Assessment Report, which states that “there is a struggle to implement an effective parent program. Schools have no school councils. Parent participation is low. There is a need for a parent contact person at each school, someone on staff trained on parent components. Personnel says, ‘We’ve got young parents, we’ve got grandparents raising students... We are not honing in on parents’ needs as much as we should.’” The district should take action to clearly align all the student and family support programs to the purpose statements and the strategic plan to promote student success and more effectively address community needs.

**Revised processes and procedures have been adopted in some areas.** The district has undergone significant changes in the central office staff within the last few years, and it is apparent from interviews that many of the new staff does not have the benefit of clearly documented standard operating procedures. One positive step has been the development of hiring procedures, but comparable efforts in other personnel areas, business operations, transportation, etc., could assist the district in achieving its objectives to “improve the collaborative budgeting process” and “ensure effective and efficient operating processes.” In particular, interviews with central office and school-level stakeholders revealed a lack of clear documentation about the budget process and gaps in the decision-making chain for various procedures and processes. Leaders noted that there are sometimes workarounds for subordinates when decisions are made. A related area for growth involves providing a clear regimen for gathering, analyzing, and using stakeholder survey data. No clear analysis of the survey data was evident, although surveys were indeed conducted during 2019, well in advance of the review. Clarification of and adherence to established processes will empower leaders at all levels and promote efficiency.

In addition, there are opportunities to establish and improve procedures for teaching and learning that could ultimately support the district in realizing its mission and vision. The development of system-

wide expectations for monitoring and reporting student progress, including formative assessment data, to both students and parents, could improve both horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum. While the district has a rudimentary grading system, there was little evidence of meaningful discussion of assessment as a tool for gauging mastery. Thus, the instructional staff should be concerned that grading both within grade levels and across grades may not be consistent or truly representative of achievement of mastery of skills and knowledge. This will particularly be important if the district follows the lead of other school districts and explores such processes as standards-based grading, assessment by rubrics, and implementation of a curriculum more focused on problem-solving and creativity.

**The system has identified specific components of high-quality instruction as priorities for the future.** Key considerations for the district to achieve this goal suggest the need to achieve consistency in instructional practices, selection and use of assessments, monitoring of instruction, and use of instructional materials and technology. The 2018-2023 strategic plan includes measures related to the use of assessment data to differentiate instruction and drive decision-making. Within the last two years, there is evidence that the district has strengthened the oversight of curriculum and instruction and initiated steps to address these goals. Overall, the team noted that classrooms were well-managed, supportive learning environments, and students were generally actively engaged in the learning. Although elite observation rating averages were at or above Cognia's network averages in most areas, the district's "Initiating" rankings have more to do with the lack of *consistency* and *embeddedness* of these instructional practices. There were pockets of strong instruction and use of data across the district, but there was only limited evidence of a systemic approach to engaging students in rigorous tasks that require collaboration and/or higher-order thinking skills.

Across schools, the team noted a wide range of assessments and data used for progress monitoring, differentiation, and instructional decisions at varying levels of implementation. Perhaps the strongest evidence of data use was found in the primary and elementary schools' implementation of the *Benchmark Literacy* curriculum. Student performance data from *Benchmark Literacy* are reviewed and analyzed to monitor progress toward goals and plan for instruction, and both teachers and parents reported in interviews that they have seen student achievement gains in the limited time the curriculum has been in use. Additionally, there is evidence that data are being used at the middle school to measure student progress and differentiate instruction to some extent. In interviews, students in grades seven and eight also reported learning about their Measurements of Academic Progress (MAP) scores, what they mean, and how their teachers planned to monitor progress to ensure students continued to improve over the course of the year.

While these examples indicate an awareness of the importance of student data collection and analysis to inform instructional decision-making, additional efforts are required to embed this practice in all classrooms and all content areas, K-12. Specifically, the use of benchmark assessment data such as MAP might continue, but the emphasis on more formative measures might increase. For example, at the high school, *USA Test Prep* is currently used as a tool for collecting formative data on student progress. However, it was not clear this is done in a systematic way, nor was there evidence of how the data collected impacts instruction. Moreover, students reported that the *USA Test Prep* items assigned are not always aligned to the current curriculum standards, and as such, there may be a disconnect between teacher and students' understanding of the data being collected, why it is being collected, and how it will be used.

There are specific steps that can be taken to improve the use of data and to support the goal of high-quality instruction in all classrooms. One suggestion is for the district to develop the capacity of schools' learning communities to regularly and systematically engage in the review and analysis of student data and hold each other accountable for its use in planning for instructional decisions. With

high-quality professional development and training, the work of the learning communities could evolve into collaborating to (1) examine student work develop shared understanding of what it means to “meet” or “exceed” standard, (2) create common assessments, (3) create interdisciplinary units, and/or (4) to observe classrooms and share best practices for instruction. The team noted evidence of learning communities in place at all schools but suggests additional actions to develop teams’ ability further to lead the work of improving professional practice to ensure high-quality instruction in their schools. Such activities might address concerns expressed by students in surveys and interviews that classroom routines tend to lack variety and excitement.

An additional growth area relates to the district and school leadership’s roles in ensuring high-quality instruction through leaders’ monitoring and providing feedback that supports teacher growth and development. The district currently partners with an outside consultant and has created a professional learning community of school and district leaders that conducts classroom walkthroughs and monitors curriculum implementation. School leaders and teachers report that Georgia’s Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) is the current platform for teacher evaluation, and principals are engaged in beginning, mid-year, and end-of-year conversations about their performance. While this formal system is important, it is suggested that principals collect formative walkthrough and other informal classroom observation data to identify both individual and collective strengths and areas for improvement. The data could be regularly shared, discussed, and used to drive the work of the professional learning teams as well.

Lastly, the team recognizes and applauds Taylor County Schools’ commitment to ensuring its staff and students have the materials and resources they need to be successful. The availability of technology resources and tools for teachers and students was noted across the system. The elect ratings in the Digital Learning Environment, which capture the extent to which learners are using technology to engage in activities that require gathering information, problem-solving, and collaborating with classmates, highlights an area of focus for continuous improvement. In order to promote and ensure student use of technology to accomplish higher-level tasks, the team suggests the creation of digital integration plans that incorporate expectations for professional development and monitoring of implementation across schools. Such plans, developed collaboratively, could address questions such as, “What are the expectations for student use of technology?” “How can technology be used to support high-quality instruction?” and “What training is needed to equip teachers with the skills to incorporate digital resources at high levels?” The district’s creation of a team to lead the development of digital integration plans would address other strategic goals, such as cultivating leadership opportunities for staff and ensuring district initiatives are aligned to the mission and vision.

The district, which has benefited from strong board leadership for many years, has been successful in gaining the support of many stakeholders for its initiatives. This is particularly evident in the longstanding approval of special purpose local option sales taxes in support of education, as attested to by documentation and board and community partner interviews. Currently, the district is in the process of planning to build a new 3-12 school, truly a once-in-a-generation event that is full of possibility. As the district embarks on this very ambitious project, it may wish to examine how to strengthen its stakeholder engagement. Specific actions could include developing vehicles for gaining the seemingly yet-untapped perspectives of students. Empowerment of high-performing staff through formalized recognition and leadership opportunities might help address the concern articulated by one board member that “we need to think outside the box.”

The preceding narrative contains many ideas pertinent to the next steps in the district’s journey of continuous improvement. It is to be hoped that the suggestions above will help Taylor County Schools achieve its vision of creating an “inspiring future for all students.”

## 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 Priorities 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
<p><b>Michael Lodico,</b> <b>Lead Evaluator</b></p>	<p>Dr. Michael Lodico spent 31 years in the public schools of North Carolina, serving as a teacher, curriculum specialist, school administrator, regional center consultant, and central office director. He retired as assistant superintendent for curriculum of Asheville City Schools in 2008. He has degrees from Cornell University and Western Carolina University. His doctoral dissertation (2003) was a study of the characteristics of most improved high schools in North Carolina. He has worked as a Lead Evaluator for Cognia since 2010, leading review teams in 18 states and several foreign countries. He has led review teams for school systems, corporations, educational service associations, and faith-based institutions. Since 2014, he has served as a Cognia Lead Evaluator Mentor.</p>
<p><b>Lenora Patterson</b></p>	<p>Dr. Lenora Patterson, Associate Lead Evaluator, is currently the director of Non-Public School Services for Cognia. In this role, Dr. Patterson manages partnerships with independent and parochial school associations to provide support through the accreditation process. Dr. Patterson transitioned from corporate finance to a career in education more than 18 years ago, after a volunteer opportunity with Junior Achievement ignited her passion for teaching and learning. She has a range of experience as a middle school teacher, school administrator, and leadership development coach, using every opportunity to improve outcomes for underachieving students. She recently returned to the U.S. working in the United Arab Emirates for three years, where she was responsible for training school leaders and teachers on the implementation of standards-based instruction. Dr. Patterson holds a degree in economics and a master's in teaching from Emory University, as well as a doctorate from Vanderbilt University.</p>
<p><b>Judy Johnston</b></p>	<p>Judy Johnston's current role is academic dean for prekindergarten through twelfth grade and elementary principal at Strong Rock Christian School in Locust Grove, Georgia. Prior to working at Strong Rock Christian School, Mrs. Johnston held numerous teaching and administrative positions. She served as the assistant superintendent for curriculum in Clayton County Schools (GA), as well as other central office and school administrative positions. She currently serves as a member of the Georgia Cognia Council. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education, a master's in middle grades education, and a specialist degree in administration and supervision at the State University of West Georgia.</p>



Team Member Name	Brief Biography
<p><b>Kelly Riney</b></p>	<p>Kelly Riney is a teacher at Upson Lee High School in Thomaston, Georgia. In her fifteen years with Colorado River Union High School District of Arizona, she served as a science teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, and athletic director. Ms. Riney holds a degree in biology from California State Polytechnic University Pomona and a master's in educational leadership from Western Governors University. Through serving on the accreditation team for her schools in Arizona, she recognized the importance the accreditation process plays in continuous school improvement. Ms. Riney served on four different teams since 2015.</p>
<p><b>Rhonda Tinker</b></p>	<p>Rhonda Tinker is in her fifth year as principal of PreK-3rd Grade in Jacksonville, Alabama. Her career spans 35 years. Before becoming a principal, she served as an assistant principal, reading coach, and classroom teacher. Mrs. Tinker earned degrees in early childhood education and educational administration. She has held certification as an early childhood generalist with the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards for the past fifteen years. She completed the National Association of Elementary School Principals PreK-3 Leadership Academy and is currently working to earn a credential as a certified instructional leader through the Council for Leaders in Alabama.</p>

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