



Right Step, Inc.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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School Accreditation Engagement Review

224278

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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 administrations 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 institution 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 institution's purpose and desired outcomes for learning. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 4 | RE: | 4 | SU: | 4 | EM: | |
| 1.3 | The institution engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 1.4 | The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support institutional effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Initiating |
| | EN: | 2 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 1.5 | The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 3 | SU: | 3 | EM: | |
| 1.6 | Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 1.7 | Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning. | | | | | | | | | Initiating |
| | EN: | 2 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 1 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 1.8 | Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the institution's purpose and direction. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 1.9 | The institution provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 3 | IM: | 3 | 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. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 4 | RE: | 3 | SU: | 4 | 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 institution. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 3 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 2.2 | The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 2.3 | The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 2.4 | The institution has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers who support their educational experiences. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 3 | SU: | 3 | EM: | |
| 2.5 | Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels. | | | | | | | | | Initiating |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 1 | RE: | 1 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 2.6 | The institution implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices. | | | | | | | | | Initiating |
| | EN: | 2 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 2.7 | Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the institution's learning expectations. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 2.8 | The institution provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 2.9 | The institution implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 4 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 2.10 | Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 5 | RE: | 5 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |

| 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: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |
| 2.12 | The institution implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | 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 institution plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the institution's effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.2 | The institution's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.3 | The institution 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: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 1 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.4 | The institution attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the institution's purpose and direction. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.5 | The institution integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 2 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.6 | The institution provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the institution. | | | | | | | | | Initiating |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 1 | RE: | 1 | SU: | 1 | EM: | |
| 3.7 | The institution demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the institution's purpose and direction. | | | | | | | | | Impacting |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 4 | RE: | 3 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |

| Resource Capacity Standards | | | | | | | | | | Rating |
|-----------------------------|--|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|-----------|
| 3.8 | The institution allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the institution's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness. | | | | | | | | | Improving |
| | EN: | 4 | IM: | 3 | RE: | 2 | SU: | 2 | EM: | |

Assurances

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

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

Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

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

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

| | | | |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Institution IEQ | 300.00 | CIN 5 Year IEQ Range | 278.34 – 283.33 |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|

Insights from the Review

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

The Accreditation Engagement Review (AER) team reviewed multiple artifacts and gathered information from interviews from stakeholders of Right Step, Inc. The team offers the following insights that highlight themes across the institution and ideas for next steps.

The school has created a collaborative and supportive culture that is aligned to its mission and purpose. The mission statement and the 4-A philosophy of attitude, attendance, academics, and achievement are embraced by all stakeholders. The team found evidence of the ways in which the staff support the mission through their interactions with parents, students, and each other. Students and parents expressed satisfaction with the positive connections the students have with the staff. All staff serve as mentors and positive role models for the students. The school philosophy has shifted from a consequence-based, punitive model to a positive, encouraging model. A point system has been initiated that allows students to earn incentives for positive behaviors and productivity. Students and parents both commented on the popularity of sports and cooking class as incentives. There is an emphasis on students' successes and achievements. Parents remarked that they can see the difference in their child's attitude toward school. Parents told the team that they are pleased with the military structure and their children respond positively to the physical training and Drill and Ceremony. Parents noted that the calls from past schools were typically negative and often resulted in their child being suspended or sent home from school. They appreciated the regular calls from the Right Step staff that always highlighted the positive as well as keeping them informed on both academic progress and the behavior of their children. Parents were thankful that the school is focused on changing behaviors rather than sending the child home. This practice has had a positive effect on both the students and their families. Staying in school has resulted in less disruption to family life and jobs. The school has increased efforts to reach out to parents by weekly calls home, the use of Bright Arrow to communicate more effectively with parents, opportunities to attend special days such as the Christmas party and graduation, and surveys. Currently, there is no formal parent group; but parents did have opportunities to volunteer prior to the pandemic. The staff of three (3) meet regularly to discuss student progress and plan. The board is supportive of the school and has embraced the change in philosophy. Continued opportunities for parent involvement will strengthen the bond between home and school.

The school is committed to data collection and data-based decision making. Both the board and school staff demonstrated a clear commitment to the ongoing use of data to improve teaching, learning, and operational efficiency. Stakeholder survey results were used routinely to inform decision-making. The staff also used information from their last Cognia review to further reflect upon and refine

their continuous improvement plan. The staff routinely reviews data connected to student attendance, behavior, and academics. Student groupings and modifications were made based on the results of formative and summative assessments. The staff understands that the students need to make significant growth on a yearly basis to be successful. All students come in at least one year below grade-level expectations with many two-three (2-3) years below expectations. Regularly scheduled meetings are held to examine weekly progress of the students and adjust instruction based on the data. However, the team did not find a great deal of longitudinal data being collected and used to track change over time. Defining and implementing a formal process for data collection and analysis will increase the capacity of the staff to adjust instruction and ensure organizational effectiveness. Longitudinal data were limited in almost all areas across the standards. Although these standards were rating improving, the team felt this was an area of weakness that needed to be addressed and impacted these two standards the most.

The school effectively manages resources that include long-range planning. The board develops an annual operating plan and a two-five (2–5) year strategic plan. The school has been in existence for 16 years. The school recently purchased a building instead of continuing to rent. This purchase allowed the school to relocate to an area that was closer to many of their students. Due to the pandemic, staffing and student numbers have decreased. Even with that change, the school has been able to provide students with the materials and resources they need to be successful. Continued strategic resource management will allow the school to provide for day-to-day needs as well as unexpected occurrences such as the pandemic.

The school is currently delivering the curriculum based on a variety of programs, online resources, and projects. The team did not find written curricula that identified the standards and expectations for learning in all subject areas. The school has adopted EngageNY for both math and language arts. The school described the language arts curriculum as a mixture of EngageNY, novels, Flocabulary.com, and the website ixl.com. A sample outline of a scope and sequence chart for English/ Language Arts and a lesson plan were submitted as evidence. It is not clear that either of those documents aligns to state standards or EngageNY. Science and social studies are taught using cross-circular projects and students also participate in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) projects. Developing a process for curriculum writing and review will ensure that instruction is based on standards and a common understanding of what students need to know and be able to do. Including a process for selecting resources will ensure that all materials, programs, and online sites are aligned to the standards and support student needs. As the school moves forward with the plan to concentrate on the middle school years and transition students to other high schools, a documented curriculum aligned to the standards will help ensure students are prepared as they move on to the next level of schooling.

The school does not have formal board policies or handbooks for staff and parents. The board operates under the guidance of a code of ethics and a document outlining their roles and responsibilities. The code of ethics states that board members “commit to establish effective board policies.” There is no documented board policy book or policies outside of those listed in the student handbook. The school operates with commonly understood procedures rather than written standard operating procedures. There appears to be a reliance on institutional memory. Over-time procedures will be lost as people change jobs, retire, or relocate. Policies are important to help the school establish rules, procedures, and standards of quality for learning and safety as well as accountability. Handbooks that contain standard operating procedures and formal policies will provide structure and direction for staff and parents.

In conclusion, the school is encouraged to study these themes, Standard ratings and other information provided in this report. By building upon strengths and prioritizing opportunities for improvement

outlined in this report, Right Step, Inc. can successfully continue the improvement journey. It is the intention of the team that the insights offered in this report will provide possible next steps to guide the school's improvement journey.

Next Steps

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

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

Team Roster

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

| Team Member Name | Brief Biography |
|--|--|
| <p>Linda Wandtke, Lead Evaluator</p> | <p>Linda Wandtke currently supervises student teachers for a college. She is a retired principal whose career spans forty (40) years in the field of education. She has been involved with accreditation work for over 25 years serving on the NCA Board of Trustees, Wisconsin State Committee, and as Lead Evaluator and team member for a variety of teams both overseas and in the United States. Ms. Wandtke has earned degrees in elementary education, curriculum and development, and administrative leadership from the University of Wisconsin, as well as certification in school improvement from the University of Nebraska.</p> |
| <p>Jason Dropnik</p> | <p>Mr. Jason P. Dropnik serves as the head of school for the Indian Community School located in Franklin, Wisconsin. The Indian Community School is a private school serving urban American Indian students in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2004 in elementary education. While a teacher, he has served Milwaukee Public Schools, Saint Francis Public Schools, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee College for Kids Summer Program, and the Indian Community School. He has led initiatives to provide STEM experiences to underserved populations, developed robotics programs, served on private school education boards, committee chairperson, and after-school programs. Mr. Dropnik received his master's degree from Concordia University in administrative leadership. Mr. Dropnik is Wisconsin state certified in school safety, has served on state curriculum writing teams, and board for Wisconsin Association of Environmental Education.</p> |

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