Barrow County School System

Winder, Georgia

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System Accreditation Engagement Review

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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.

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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:**	3	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	3
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4
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:**	4	**EM:**	4
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	3	**RE:**	4	**SU:**	4	**EM:**	4
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	**IM:**	4	**RE:**	3	**SU:**	3	**EM:**	4

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Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	3
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	3
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	4

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.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	3
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3

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Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	3
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	2
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to the demonstrable improvement of student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	3
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4

Resource Capacity Domain

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

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4

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

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	349.19	CIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33

Insights from the Review

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

The Accreditation Engagement Review for Barrow County School System was conducted entirely online as the Engagement Review Team (team) gained as much information as possible to rate the Cognia Performance Standards by reviewing the evidence and engaging all stakeholder groups in the remote process. Quality information gathering sessions included a presentation by the superintendent, interviews with 215 stakeholders representing all stakeholder groups, and a deep dive into the evidence provided to the team. The team found the following themes across the school system and provided suggestions for next steps.

The governing board, superintendent, and system leadership provide dedicated and focused leadership with a clear direction and commitment to the school system's continuous improvement. As evidenced through board minutes and interviews, the governing authority commits to the establishment and adherence to policies that promote the system's effective operations. Board members participate in multiple training opportunities and continuously provide leadership with autonomy for day-to-day operations. Being designated as an "Exemplary Board" by the Georgia School Boards Association for five years provides proof that board members internalized their training, and their actions align with the code of ethics. A board member shared how one of the most important jobs of the governing board is selecting a highly-qualified superintendent. "He understands instruction and meets regularly with system and school leaders to ensure that everyone is working towards the vision of being

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Boldly Committed to Student Success," stated an administrator. When asked about the superintendent, stakeholders used the following words to describe him: dedicated, hard-working, receptive, intentional, focused, and collaborative. Stakeholder groups spoke of the superintendent's strengths and referenced the system-level administrators and shared how the entire team is moving in the same direction. Interviews and documentation revealed system and school leaders who always seek to find ways to better serve children. Leaders effectively implement supervision and evaluation processes and analyze results to inform professional practices and ensure student learning. Data from the analysis of standard operating procedures show growth and improvement in the effective implementation of routine operations that support teaching and learning across the system.

Interviews revealed strong School Governance Teams (SGTs) comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students at the high school level. Members of the SGTs were a part of the interview process and readily shared how they are involved in such decisions as principal selection, code of conduct updates, calendar development and school improvement planning.

The laser focus on continuous improvement is substantiated through the documentation of the collaborative process implemented to develop the strategic plan for 2021-2026. The comprehensive process created universal ownership and support for system improvement with four high-level focus areas identified: academic and student success; elevating the teaching profession; communication and culture; and finances and infrastructure. Similarly, the schools follow a defined process through the Georgia Department of Education's problem-solving process and Systems of Continuous Improvement. Records and interviews demonstrate a very structured, systematic improvement process with systems thinking as all stakeholders focus on *Barrow BOLD: Building our Learning Differently*. The system is to be commended on its strong leadership. The team encourages the ongoing commitment to using systems thinking principles and planning so that it is deeply ingrained and protected throughout the operations of the school system.

Meaningful stakeholder engagement and intentional communication efforts are cornerstones of the school system's success. Artifacts and interviews indicated the inclusion of all stakeholder groups in the development of the strategic plan. Community members, parents, staff, and students were well-represented in the groups interviewed by the team, and each group spoke of regularly scheduled sessions to get their input. Participating in the comprehensive needs assessment process, SGTs, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) advisory committees, Parent Advisory Council, Title One parent meetings, and Partners in Education were just a few of the opportunities afforded stakeholder groups. "Various groups are also surveyed, and leaders meet with us to discuss survey results and ask for input on next steps for improvement," shared a stakeholder. Parent, student, teacher and community surveys are some of the many surveys the system had administered and analyzed to guide decision-making. Students shared that their input is also gathered through active student councils. Teacher survey results revealed a feeling of camaraderie and cohesiveness with 82% of the teachers feeling supported at work. Community surveys substantiated strong community support and buy-in with positive, long-standing relationships with city and county organizations that led to collaborative partnerships and initiatives. Strong partnerships with post-secondary organizations such as Lanier Technical College and the University of Georgia have led to increased opportunities for students and teachers. Survey results indicate that 62% of the community members responding to the surveys had been involved in the schools for over 12 years. Several internal and external stakeholders spoke of their strong belief that it takes a great school system to have a great community and it takes a great community to have a great school system. "Examples of this include partnerships with Foothills Education Charter High School, United Way, Foodbank of Northeast Georgia, APEX Mental Health Counseling, Leadership Barrow, Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency, the Boys/Girls Club, and Kubota and Caterpillar as part of the dual enrollment program," stated an

employee. Artifacts revealed two high schools were provided with top-of-the-line turf fields because of partnerships with the Barrow County Recreation Department and Board of Commissioners.

Internal stakeholders reported their input is valued, and they are heavily engaged in the school system's collaborative decision-making process. System leaders shared information about professional learning communities (PLCs) being conducted regularly to review student data and make system-wide decisions to impact student achievement. Teachers spoke of collaborative planning times to review curriculum, pacing guides, and student performance data. Without exception, every stakeholder group spoke of their meaningful engagement in the collaborative culture for supporting learners in pursuit of their goals.

The system's intentional communication efforts directly connect to its successful stakeholder engagement. The team heard the words ''intentional and collaborative" repeatedly during internal and external stakeholder group interviews as school system participants spoke with pride of their notable improvements in communications with families and the community. In addition to the numerous surveys administered and analyzed as a part of the continuous improvement process, the system uses multiple media avenues. Artifacts revealed the system uses monthly Board Briefs, BOLD TV public access channel, Parent Link phone calls and emails, Remind text-messaging system-wide, newsletters, system-wide tip line, direct messaging, local advertising, updated system and school websites, annual reports and publications, and social media outlets Interviews validated the information in the Executive Summary regarding the improved quality and quantity of communications after the system hired a public relations director and a digital content specialist. One internal stakeholder shared, "We are better at telling our story. We engage folks, so they are empowered." The system currently expects active engagement of all stakeholder groups and frequent and varied communication efforts. The review team encourages the system to ensure that these practices and programs continue to be ingrained throughout the school system's culture.

The school system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and wise use of resources to support the system's mission and vision. Financial records and the facilities plan provide evidence of adherence to the established budgets. Continuous monitoring is evident through interviews and artifact/records reviews. Leadership proudly reported a sound fund balance, clean audits for the past six years and an excellent financial reporting record as noted by being the recipient of the Award of Distinction for Excellent Financial Reporting by the State of Georgia twice in the past three years. "Because the county is a growing community, the school system has had to manage the growth with extensive planning and the development of a tracking mechanism to predict where growth will occur in order to develop construction and facilities plans accordingly," stated a system leader. Documentation showed that the system has enjoyed the passage of six Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) initiatives with funding being used to support the five-year facilities plan with recent school construction of the new high school, Barrow Arts and Sciences Academy (BASA). All stakeholder groups spoke with pride of the growing Innovation Campus which includes BASA, The Sims Career Academy, Lanier Technical College's Barrow Campus, and the Innovation Amphitheater. Interviews also revealed beginning construction of the new Innovation Elementary School followed by a second phase of BASA and a magnet-style middle school.

Having a high-quality workforce is another important component of strategic resource management. Records and interviews indicate that the teacher attrition rate has been below the state average for years, with the attrition rate for FY2020 at 14.37% as compared to the state average of 16.7%. A very structured and standardized hiring process was shared with teachers serving on interview committees for teachers and SGTs serving on hiring committees for principals. Interviews validated the system's *Grow Our Own* initiative as interested students are followed and supported in selecting teaching as a profession. The self-assessment documented the creation of the *True Rewards Benefits Initiative,* and system leadership reported numerous components of the initiative to include direct pay (payroll) and

indirect pay (benefits) including retirement benefits, student loan debt mitigation and other "financial wellness" matters. Artifacts revealed the system's Planning and Personnel Department being awarded the Gold Level Strategic Partnership Award for innovative and strategic partnerships with industry to promote hiring the best teachers, administrators and support staff. This same department was proud to share its receipt of an Outstanding Award for Virtual Career Fair during the pandemic.

Administrators and teachers shared the strong induction, mentoring and coaching programs with new teachers being connected to veteran teachers (mentors) for ongoing support; each elementary and middle school having an instructional coach; literacy and math content specialists supporting teachers across the system; and two educational technology integration specialists supporting teachers with integrating technology into instruction. "We know that professional development is key to improving the learning environment, student achievement, and system effectiveness. Therefore, we have developed a robust professional learning program," stated a system leader. Records and interviews indicate that regularly scheduled PLCs operate throughout the system as a platform for continuous development and improvement of staff members' professional practices. Interviews substantiated the receipt of a Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading Georgia (L4GA) grant for $4.4 million to improve literacy in the classroom. "Even with this grant, we still have needs for additional book sets and other materials and resources to support student needs, interests, and the teaching and learning programs," stated an internal stakeholder. Educators spoke of not having an increase in tax millage since 2007, ranking 147 out of 180 systems in revenue per pupil, and having to be "lean and mean" with general fund budgeting. The team commends the system for its resource allocations that are consistently aligned to the identified goals and key priorities. Yet, the system is encouraged to continue its commitment to securing grants and other funding sources to implement the 1:1 technology initiative as well as provide access to additional informational resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff and the system.

Educators effectively implement the system's instructional framework by engaging in the monitoring and adjusting of instructional practices that result in meeting the specialized needs of all learners. Artifacts and the self-assessment document substantiated a system-wide adoption of common instructional frameworks based on the Workshop Model. Several teachers and leaders spoke of training in the use of *Instructional Conversations* strategies by the University of Georgia. The system monitors instruction, makes adjustments, and assesses student progress using systematic processes. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are used to review student progress and modify units depending on student needs. Leaders shared how problems in instructional practices are identified through a formal instructional rounds process that involves system and school leaders and teachers visiting classrooms, recording information, and debriefing to identify and address problems of practice. Progress checks are also used to monitor the extent to which schools are successfully implementing the action steps of their school improvement plans. Progress is also monitored using running records at the elementary level, the ELLevation Platform for English Learners, formative data analysis to include Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Text Reading Comprehension, and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Although Milestones data are reviewed and utilized, interviews substantiated the use of conditional growth targets as indicated by MAP assessments to determine student growth and improvement.

Document reviews revealed programs, services, and resources to address learners' needs in the social, emotional, developmental, and academic areas. Leaders and teachers shared the documented referral process for special education, Response to Intervention (RTI), and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Evidence validated a well-defined MTSS process with services including early intervention, remedial education, English to Speakers of Other Languages, gifted education, migrant education and counseling services. Commitment to meeting the social and emotional needs of students is

substantiated through implementation of such programs and practices as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Seven Mindsets, Be the Voice bullying prevention programs, advisement periods, and APEX Mental Health Counseling. Several stakeholders shared how the system has added academic interventionists and graduation coaches to support developmental and academic needs of students. When asked about points of pride and notable achievements, many stakeholders shared the graduation rate reaching an all-time high of 88% and the rate for Students with Disabilities (SWD) moving from 37.9% in 2014 to 75% in 2020. “Our focus on data usage in manageable and proper ways, use of MAP data, progress monitoring, school improvement progress checks, and instructional rounds have given us timely and actionable data for instructional decision-making,” stated a system leader.

When interviewing internal and external stakeholder groups about meeting the specialized needs of students, preparing students for their futures was a common theme. Many highlighted the career pathways, dual enrollment courses, and work-based learning opportunities provided for students. Staff shared the planning and development phase of the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program. Leaders shared a multitude of accelerated and enhanced learning opportunities for students to include gifted programs, Honors programs, Advanced Placement courses, and multiple education Pathways. Innovative pedagogies were highlighted through programs at the Sims Academy of Innovation and Technology, Center for Innovative Teaching, and BASA. The team commends the system on its data analysis to monitor and adjust instruction and its commitment to identifying and addressing the specialized needs of all learners. The team encourages the system to continue these practices to ensure they are embedded in the culture of the system.

There is a documented need to refine the robust, developmentally appropriate curriculum that currently exists in the school system. One of the four targeted areas of the new strategic plan is academics and student success. At the center of this targeted area for improvement is the creation of a robust, developmentally appropriate, simplified curriculum that is accessible to teachers, students, parents and families. The Executive Summary included the mission of the central office staff to better facilitate supporting of all schools by moving forward with the idea of “Simplify and Focus in Order to Strengthen.” Leaders and teachers addressed the need to ensure a common curriculum framework, not a collection of scripted programs. Documents and interviews substantiated great strides made in curriculum alignment in recent years as exemplified by the district-wide implementation of three new curricular programs: the Units of Study for Teaching Reading (K-8); Benchmark Phonics Workshop (K-2); and Open Up Math (6-8). “We are pleased that students across the school system are getting a more consistent educational experience through the use of these programs within our instructional framework. Yet, teachers are struggling with the implementation of some of these new curricular initiatives, “especially with the conceptual aspect of Open Up Math,” stated a leader. Teachers shared how the Open Up Math curriculum is difficult, and more practice and remediation had to be added. “We are not where we need to be with project-based learning and the promotion of creativity and collaborative problem-solving at all grade levels. With our new curriculum initiatives, our professional development opportunities, and our futuristic decision-making, we will make the refinement of our robust curriculum a reality,” stated an internal stakeholder. The team applauds the system on its commitment to a curriculum based on high expectations and encourages the use of a systematic process to ensure the written curriculum is aligned to a rigorous set of standards and is implemented with quality and fidelity.

Even with the focus on continuous improvement, the system lacks formalized processes and procedures in some identified areas to ensure organizational consistency and sustained growth over time. When asked about the initiatives in place to ensure learners develop relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences, a multitude of activities and programs were mentioned by interview participants. Having Check-in Check-out with mentors; advisement periods;

work with graduation coaches; Houses/homeroom times; participation in clubs, sports and other extra-curricular activities; social worker referrals; advisement with school counselors; Seven Mindsets; Be the Voice bullying prevention program; and PBIS were some of the activities and resources documented by artifacts and mentioned in stakeholder interviews. Artifacts and interviews revealed excitement about the many relationship-building initiatives at the various schools, but there was lack of evidence of consistency across grade levels. For example, with nine elementary schools, staff could not speak to the consistency of formalized adult advocacy structures across all elementary schools in the system. Also, limited data were shared on the effectiveness of these many advocacy/relationship-building programs throughout the school system.

Although documentation disclosed that learning progress is assessed and communicated frequently, there was very little evidence that common grading practices have been established. Interviews with staff members revealed varying processes being executed in the implementation of the grading practices aligned to specific criteria. Some mentioned standards-based report cards; some mentioned content/grade level common grading categories; and some shared common grading practices used only within a given school. One administrator stated, “Common grading is an ongoing battle. Grading is all over the place.” Artifacts nor interview evidence substantiated the implementation of common grading practices across all classrooms and programs at a given level. Whether it is adult advocacy structures/protocols or common grading practices, the team recommends that the system continue formalizing the processes and procedures to ensure consistency and sustained growth over time.

At the center of success for Barrow County School System are the following: a dedicated and determined leadership team with a laser focus on continuous improvement; meaningful stakeholder engagement and intentional communication efforts; implementation of an instructional framework that effectively meets the specialized needs of all learners; and strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and wise use of human and fiscal resources aligned to system needs and priorities. The Engagement Review Team members listened carefully to the system’s stakeholders and appreciated their willingness to share information about strengths and challenges. Records substantiated a school system that is focused on providing a quality education for all students. For increased success and educational excellence for all students, refining an already robust, developmentally appropriate curriculum and formalizing processes and practices to ensure organizational consistency will increase sustainability of the system’s efficiency and effectiveness. There are many institutionalized, high-quality programs and initiatives across the system. The themes present opportunities for continued growth in an already highly effective school system that could positively impact student achievement and system effectiveness.

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 eleot 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)
Cheryl Allread **Lead Evaluator**	Dr. Cheryl Allread's career spans over 48 years. She retired from Marion County Schools in South Carolina after seven years as a math and science teacher,11 years as a principal, 11 years as an assistant superintendent for instruction, and seven years as a district superintendent. After retirement from 36 years in Marion County, she began working as a consultant with the South Carolina State Department of Education, serving as a liaison for low-performing schools. She also conducted academic audits, served as a principal mentor, and served as a leadership coach in instructional supervision. Dr. Allread currently works as Lead Evaluator for Cognia in schools and systems across the United States and internationally, as well as continuing to work as a consultant with schools and systems in instructional supervision.
Kellie Ryan, Associate Lead Evaluator, Professional learning facilitator for school improvement	
Lenisera Barnes-Bodison, Executive director of curriculum and instruction	
Patti Johnson, Director of academics and testing	
Derek Parten, Middle school principal	
Leigh Sears, Director of elementary schools	

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