



# Sunman-Dearborn Community School Co

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Saint Leon, IN

**September 20-23, 2021**

**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

**65245**

## Table of Contents

<b>Cognia Continuous Improvement System .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Initiate.....	2
Improve .....	2
Impact.....	2
<b>Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership Capacity Domain .....	4
Learning Capacity Domain.....	5
Resource Capacity Domain .....	6
<b>Assurances .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality® .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Insights from the Review .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Next Steps .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Team Roster .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>References and Readings.....</b>	<b>17</b>

# Cognia Continuous Improvement System

Cognia defines continuous improvement as "an embedded behavior rooted in an institution's culture that constantly focuses on conditions, processes, and practices to improve teaching and learning." The Cognia Continuous Improvement System (CIS) provides a systemic, fully integrated solution to help institutions map out and navigate a successful improvement journey. In the same manner that educators are expected to understand the unique needs of every learner and tailor the education experience to drive student success, every institution must be empowered to map out and embrace their unique improvement journey. Cognia expects institutions to use the results and the analysis of data from various interwoven components for the implementation of improvement actions to drive education quality and improved student outcomes. While each improvement journey is unique, the journey is driven by key actions. The findings of the Engagement Review Team are organized by the ratings from the Cognia Performance Standards Diagnostic and the Levels of Impact within the i3 Rubric: Initiate, Improve, and Impact.

## Initiate

The first phase of the improvement journey is to **Initiate** actions to cause and achieve better results. The elements of the Initiate phase are defined within the Levels of Impact of Engagement and Implementation. Engagement is the level of involvement and frequency of stakeholders in the desired practices, processes, or programs within the institution. Implementation is the process of monitoring and adjusting the administration of the desired practices, processes, or programs for quality and fidelity. Standards identified within Initiate should become the focus of the institution's continuous improvement journey toward the collection, analysis, and use of data to measure the results of engagement and implementation. Enhancing the capacity of the institution in meeting these Standards has the greatest potential impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

## Improve

The second phase of the improvement journey is to gather and evaluate the results of actions to **Improve**. The elements of the **Improve** phase are defined within the Levels of Impact of Results and Sustainability. Results come from the collection, analysis, and use of data and evidence to demonstrate attaining the desired result(s). Sustainability is results achieved consistently to demonstrate growth and improvement over time (a minimum of three years). Standards identified within Improve are those in which the institution is using results to inform their continuous improvement processes and to demonstrate over time the achievement of goals. The institution should continue to analyze and use results to guide improvements in student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

## Impact

The third phase of achieving improvement is **Impact**, where desired practices are deeply entrenched. The elements of the **Impact** phase are defined within the Level of Impact of Embeddedness. Embeddedness is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are deeply ingrained in the culture and operation of the institution. Standards identified within Impact are those in which the institution has demonstrated ongoing growth and improvement over time and has embedded the practices within its culture. Institutions should continue to support and sustain these practices that yield results in improving student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

# Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal in leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research-based standards, the Cognia Accreditation Process examines the whole institution—the program, the cultural context, and the community of stakeholders—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. Through the accreditation process, highly skilled and trained Engagement Review Teams gather first-hand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution's performance against the research-based Cognia Performance Standards. Review teams use these Standards to assess the quality of learning environments to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning. Cognia provides Standards that are tailored for all education providers so that the benefits of accreditation are universal across the education community.

Through a comprehensive review of evidence and information, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality. Using the Standards, the review team provides valuable feedback to institutions, which helps to focus and guide each institution's improvement journey. Valuable evidence and information from other stakeholders, including students, also are obtained through interviews, surveys, and additional activities.

## Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results

The Cognia Performance Standards Diagnostic is used by the Engagement Review Team to evaluate the institution's effectiveness based on the Cognia Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity**, and **Resource Capacity**. Results are reported within four ranges identified by color. The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

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

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

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

## Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	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:	4	IM:	4	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	

## Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement and success is the primary expectation of every institution. An effective learning culture is characterized by positive and productive teacher/learner relationships, high expectations and standards, a challenging and engaging curriculum, quality instruction and comprehensive support that enable all learners to be successful, and assessment practices (formative and summative) that monitor and measure learner progress and achievement. Moreover, a quality institution evaluates the impact of its learning culture, including all programs and support services, and adjusts accordingly.

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.									Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.									Initiating
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
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:	2	EM:	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to the demonstrable improvement of student learning.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	

## Resource Capacity Domain

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

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
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:	3	EM:	
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:	2	SU:	2	EM:	

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

<b>Institution IEQ</b>	<b>338.06</b>	<b>CIN 5 Year IEQ Range</b>	<b>278.34 – 283.33</b>
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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, 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 Engagement Review Team (team) identified five themes aligned to the continuous improvement process at Sunman-Dearborn Community Schools. These themes present both strengths and opportunities to guide the institution's improvement journey. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the review was conducted remotely and did not include classroom observations. Themes include a dedication to a growth climate and culture, the commitment to program evaluation processes, meeting individualized needs for student success, a curriculum process to build toward best practice instruction, and professional development.

**The district has clearly aligned its board, district leadership, school leadership, central office operations and fiscal responsibilities to create a path toward improvement and vision attainment.** A clear and unifying mission and vision has been established by an inclusive body of representatives from internal and external stakeholder groups participating in a formal process to develop and document the District Strategic Plan 2017-22. "Surpassing expectations and inspiring excellence in every student, every day" is the driving force for the five identified core values of stewardship, data driven decisions, collaboration, shared leadership, and commitment. Objectives for technology, academic achievement, financial and culture/climate/safety were written with measurable goal statements and timelines for achievement and are posted on the website. School leadership teams describe the corporation's overarching strategic plan as a guide to their school improvement planning process with the use of school data to determine goals and actions. School plans provide comprehensive and detailed coverage of the "whole picture."

Board members identified their role in the continuous improvement process as ensuring and supporting the good leadership of the corporation to deliver the content of the strategic plan, along with the financial sufficiency to make these plans a reality. A detailed set of policies are adopted and critically and independently reviewed by the Indiana School Board Association (ISBA). NEOLA® provides service to the district for developing and updating board bylaws, policies, and policy revisions. Updates are provided two to three times each year for board action. Board members project a clear knowledge of their roles and responsibilities with policies housed on Board Docs for easy access. However, neither a formalized process for individual board member self-evaluation nor overall board evaluation were evidenced. Including board functions within a rubric structure that parallels that developed for staff could provide modeling of this process at the board level while embedding a thorough understanding of the process among board members. Participation in quarterly ISBA offerings are available for board member participation, but during interviews it was identified that professional development "is probably not a strength." Pursuing board level professional development in a strategic manner by targeting both seasoned and newly elected board members for their continued growth and expertise could contribute to

sustaining high quality board leadership. When asked if the board had a conflict-of-interest policy, the response was a unified and resounding “absolutely.” The team learned that this policy is reviewed annually and documented with board member signatures.

Consistently identified during all stakeholder interviews were high expectations and the common culture of transparent decision-making. Board members identified the collaborative work of the superintendent and principals in support of a cohesive vision and plans and spoke of the monthly reports on improvement progress they are provided. Data collection and analysis to measure goal progress is the norm. Financial goal success is evidenced by the strong cash balance of the corporation. The corporation’s commitment over the past four years to a major increase in starting salaries and benefits for staff have resulted in it having the highest compensation package in the region. A two-year contract with teachers has been ratified. Staff retention is strong and confirmed through interviews and with the State of Indiana online school report card. Staff shared that they stay or return to the district because of it “strong tradition of excellence” and “high expectations.” “The year of gratitude to staff” is a top-down focus for 2021-22 to celebrate successes and provide recognition for the contributions of staff. This action exemplifies the corporation’s supportive and high expectations culture that attracts and retains qualified staff. The corporation appears to have access to raw data that could be summarized and used for an even more in-depth impact study of long-range personnel issues.

A comprehensive \$54 million building project for facilities and programming without raising the property tax rate exemplifies the strategic long-term resource management of the corporation. Financial and human resources aligned to achieve the technology goals with 1:1 use of Chromebooks K-12 along with a refresh plan to ensure their continued availability and use. The presentation overview highlighted the collection and monitoring of Northwest Education Association (NWEA) state-aligned computerized adaptive tests (Measures of Academic Progress/MAP) since 2019. Stakeholder interviews consistently confirmed the use of electronic newsletters, emails, podcasts, and PowerSchool as tools used for effective communication and engagement of all stakeholders. Operational staff spoke of their involvement in the decision-making process that resulted in technology and programs now in use. Route finder technology now monitors transportation routes, identifies where students are, and when they are picked up. Communications with parents are provided through Messenger, improving the work of the transportation department while simultaneously making their work easier. Another successful technological implementation is the portal for employees to view payroll direct deposit details. Employees are now able to view their own information and track items like attendance, sick days, and leaves of absence. Policies are located on the website and accessed by all employee groups. Staff identified testing packets containing a quiz on new policies to “make sure we understand them.” The technology director has instructional integration experience and is helping to spearhead, with active leadership involvement, the Guiding Coalition for Technology Training efforts to acquire and train staff in best practice use of Google Classroom, NWEA statistical tracking, and e-textbooks. This process is still in a strong early stage and primed for continued growth.

Building principals voiced their understanding of leadership as a shared responsibility with efforts to engage all staff. Book studies to support instructional strategy efforts are implemented. The Middle School has started the school year with a book study for *I Wish My Teacher Knew How One Question Can Change Everything For Our Kids* by Kyle Schwartz. Secondary departments are encouraged to expand “pathways” and course development. Growing teachers’ skills in the use of NWEA data at the high school is part of this shared responsibility. Elementary leaders supported the transition from Response to Intervention (RTI) to the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) structure. Two principals, with encouragement from the superintendent, participate in the Indiana Professional Licensing Agency cohort. Coaches work with staff to enhance professional practice by refocusing former departmental meetings into discussions of best practice collaborative learning topics. A school leader explained to the

team how “there is an expectation for excellence with my peers holding me accountable. The transition for me to showing my students how to lead is easy.” Secondary school leaders talked of the use of PowerSchool to break down instruction by standard and skill with teachers examining student assessment data and coding instruction. Tracking and publishing data that links specific professional practice from the Teacher Evaluation Rubric with student summative assessment results could also incentivize teacher professional learning community conversations for collective examinations of instructional practice targeting measurable impact on student learning outcomes.

Teachers and school leaders consistently spoke of the use of MAP data during grade level, MTSS, and department meetings for making instructional decisions and adjustments to support student learning. Of the staff, 100% are certified for the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate) safety protocol and for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) confirming actions to achieve the established goal. Parents repeatedly cited the safe environment provided by the schools as a strength. The team identified formal processes for the collection, analysis and use of multiple forms of data to demonstrate progress toward attaining the desired results. Leaders meaningfully engage community stakeholders to support the achievement of the corporation’s purpose and direction. Interviews confirm how business partners provide services in support of student learning and opportunities. Seven business members participated in an advisory committee that toured the high school facility and offered suggestions for curriculum consideration. The HOPE committee met with principals and the superintendent to implement and pay for an anti-bullying campaign. K-8 students sign a pledge at the school or one of eight business locations and receive a wrist band with HOPE on one side and TRUE TROJAN on the other. Local businesses work with the schools to provide working experience for special needs students. Schools are considered as important partners in community development. A new manufacturing employer was excited about the opportunity to engage with the schools to prepare students for future employment. Supporting adjudicated students with their continuing education was also identified as another collaborative partnership. The team recognizes the path created and implemented throughout the Sunman-Dearborn corporation as one that is systemic, sustained, and embedded in the culture.

**The district has established and implemented an overarching framework with protocols and processes creating structures for consistency of program implementation and evaluation for organizational and student learning effectiveness.** A high priority of the corporation has been refocusing the purpose and process of teacher evaluations to observable and measurable teacher behaviors linked to a direct impact on student learning. Interviews confirm the participation of representatives from each school, principals, central office administrators and superintendent in the creation of the Teacher Evaluation Rubric 3.0 that is used in all schools. This rubric contains three sections: purposeful planning, effective instruction, and core professionalism each with detailed descriptors for specific behaviors. To ensure fidelity of implementation, embedded in the process are sessions devoted to inter-rater reliability that provide information and practice in the identification of teacher competency levels. Teacher evaluation is clearly presented with the FAQ document and staff memo addressing the purpose for the rubric, details of its use, and timelines for observations. Interviews confirm that all employee groups participate in a formal annual evaluation process but also identified ongoing and informal ways job performance is monitored and addressed by leadership. Immediate feedback with identified strengths and areas of improvement are the norm. Teacher evaluation data are reviewed and compared across buildings during quarterly teacher evaluator meetings with the superintendent. Evaluation data are monitored, documented, and shared with the board and state department of education.

The overview presentation and internal staff focus group interviews identified monthly meetings for in-depth review of the five-year strategic plan documented with a progress worksheet for each goal. Quarterly summative and formative instructional and student assessment data are reviewed. The

importance of a positive school environment is identified within the plan. The annually administered Cognia survey monitors progress over a five-year span on culture and climate attitudes and expectations with items addressing shared mission, leadership, learning environment, communication, growth and development and a final area for overall comments. The survey is completed by all certified and non-certified staff along with administrators. Results are analyzed by the Culture and Climate committee with actions identified. A district score was established as a goal and a baseline score set in 2017. Growth toward goal attainment is positive but fell short in 2018, was met in 2019, and exceeded in 2020. The superintendent meets with each principal to track and monitor building level results and study action steps. The team heard a strong understanding of and involvement in the goal review process on the part of leadership and SIP committee members; however, other staff seemed less familiar with or engaged in the improvement process overall. Parents reported responding to surveys once or twice a year from the school but not about any results from those surveys. Consistently implemented protocols and processes evidence the focus of leadership to embed best practice in all aspects of the corporation. The team suggests building upon current efforts and creating additional mechanisms to expand the understanding of the overall improvement process as well as the accomplishments and focused areas of continued attention could lead to maximize ownership and ultimately goal achievement.

**Established structures and opportunities identify and address the individualized learning needs of students supporting their success at the next level.** Students are provided equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve established learning outcomes. Ensuring high school completion through programs focused on the specific needs of students has led to the development and implementation of Graduation Pathways. Students are provided four diploma designation options, employable skills options for project-based learning, work-based learning, and service-based learning along with one post-secondary ready competency. Counselors and students alike spoke of coursework consultations to align student abilities and interests with course selection and post-graduation plans. The student resource team is available at the secondary schools to help with homework or to provide additional assistance to students for their studies. Parents of elementary students spoke of the “tons of resources available if you need extra help” with e-learning help desk and web sites as examples. The corporation recently intentionally expanded special education services to become more responsive to local management of effective services for students with special education needs.

Individualized learning needs and interests are recognized and supported. Students have a range of co-curricular activities, sports, performing arts, clubs, and organizations, such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), world language immersion and travel components to choose from. Participation rates are monitored, tracked, and used to make improvement decisions. Preparing students for career options and their post-graduation life is structured. Students explained how everyone is required to go through real world experiences, like managing a checking account, researching colleges and college opportunities, examining work-force opportunities as a regular part of their high school experience. Opportunities provided to high school students include Advanced Placement courses, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana dual credit programs, and Project Lead the Way pre-engineering college credit options. Parents spoke highly of the career readiness opportunities provided to high school students and said students are sought out for good-paying careers by some of the top companies in Indiana. The processes to identify students functioning significantly beyond grade level expectations are clearly presented in the corporation’s High Ability Handbook. Instruction is delivered for gifted students in math and language arts through the use of student clusters in first through fifth grade and by identified courses in the sixth through twelfth grades. Guidance and special education staff work with students and their parents both formally and informally to address specialized learning needs. Social-emotional Learning (SEL) support has been identified as a growing need with current work focused on developing a common understanding and appropriate screening tools and programs for interventions and support.

Cognia perception survey results have identified a four-year increase in staff culture focused on impacting student learning and support. Engaging in reflection and personal goal setting occurs at all levels for staff and students. The team was provided a goal setting example from the parent of a kindergarten student who set a goal to “keep my desk straight.” Older students identify reading goals targeting areas they need to work on. Teachers develop action plans to address professional growth areas. Characteristics of an effective classroom learning environment have been identified and woven into the teacher observation and evaluation process. Continued professional development in this area will support and enhance teacher skills, thereby ensuring that in each and every classroom activities for, with, and by students maximize learning. Social-emotional learning (SEL) screening and supports were highlighted as a need during the superintendent’s overview presentation and during interviews with teachers. Common language and shared understanding, strategies, and implementation of programs and practice are in early stages of delivery in the COVID era. Open, honest, and transparent communications were praised throughout focus group interviews. Parents of elementary students report the use of Class DoJo, a digital communication tool that connects them to teachers who keep them current and informed with pictures and videos from the classroom as well as a quick rating of student behavior. Much appreciated by parents are the agendas that teachers provide at the beginning of the year that clearly identify expectations and support open communication. A culture of student support and responsibility is exemplified at the elementary with kindergarten mentoring. One parent explained how her fifth-grade son, the youngest of three at home, is now responsible for mentoring a kindergarten student.

Monitoring and adjusting instruction to meet individual learners’ needs and the corporation’s learning expectations are part of the day-to-day culture observed by the team. Edmentum, an adaptive diagnostic assessment to identify student learning gaps and academic strengths within a vertical K-12 progression of skills, was highlighted by teachers and leadership. MTSS structure with data collection and targeted plans of assistance documented in Intervention Plans are created for individual students in elementary grades. Middle school teachers and leaders are in an early phase of MTSS implementation with identified data collection aspects currently in use. Common assessments are being collaboratively developed and provide data for analysis by teacher teams. Implementing Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questioning and assignments into daily instruction is identified as a growth area. Leadership shared that “We need to get away from points to complete an assignment and support adjusting instruction based on how kids did on DOK questions.” Common Assessment Data Meeting Agenda-Teachers level is a template providing the structure for the careful examination of specific learning objective, the DOK level for the groups of students and all students with plans for addressing the learning needs. The team concurs and supports the value of developing the link between essential and key concepts in the curriculum being delivered, the learner’s assessed instructional level for the curriculum, and use of DOK language to adjust individual student work, thereby differentiating instruction for all students to achieve mastery of course essential skills and knowledge. During interviews teachers did not reference this powerful connection reflecting an early stage of understanding and application. Providing continued professional development and tracking the level of use of the Common Assessment Data Meeting Agenda-Teachers is encouraged by the team.

Informal structures to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences are present throughout the schools. Teachers shared that prior to the pandemic, in one elementary building an adult had been assigned to each kindergarten student and stayed with that child until they moved to the next level building. The high school implements a student-to-student ambassador program but not adult to student mentors. Interviews consistently indicated informal caring adult-student interactions, especially during extracurricular activities. However, no formal

evidence was reviewed. Increasing the understanding of best practice social-emotional learning and what makes these practices different from a generally caring culture is a suggested next step for growth.

**Individual school staff present a varying understanding of processes for aligning curriculum instruction and assessments to standards and monitoring instruction for impact on student learning.** Development of curriculum pacing guides and their use during collaborative teacher sessions was evidenced through documents and interviews. Grade level coordination at the elementary and middle schools is in place. The development of special education Life Skills at the high school has made great strides with other curriculum alignment work in initial stages. High ability curriculum listings for Advanced Placement, dual credit, Project Lead the Way, and multiple language courses are in place. PowerSchool Standards reports provide information on standards, grade distribution, and assignment data and are available for school and district teams in their work to align curriculum and instruction. Results of this work have not yet been monitored with specific data. Interviews indicate that teachers and staff seem less aware and more disconnected from school improvement work in this area versus leadership perceptions. An area of caution and to support efforts going forward is the need to expand teacher understanding that high expectations go beyond providing advanced courses but must be embedded into every course and classroom. A continued focus on DOK usage to verify differentiation meeting the needs of all learners in each classroom is encouraged.

Elementary and middle school teachers and building leaders confirmed good progress on pacing and alignment efforts with examples reviewed by the team. Interviews reflect consistent understanding of curriculum alignment and grade level coordination. Individual high school teachers, but not a significant number of those interviewed, clearly articulate this work and the application to their instructional planning. Individual school improvement plans place a high priority for making progress in these efforts. COVID was cited as a contributing factor for the slowdown of their progress. The team encourages re-starting this goal with renewed timelines and measures for monitoring teacher/leader progress.

**Professional learning communities are evolving and include data collection and analysis, but do not yet rigorously and consistently monitor and adjust best practice instruction to impact sustained student performance.** With the state's assessment requirements and tools in flux, the assessment of student academic performance has been reliably assessed with NWEA instruments. NWEA district data maintained since 2014, are analyzed at the corporation and building levels and used for improvement planning. The MAP Student Growth Summary identifies a significant percent of the student population at all grade levels as not meeting their growth projection in mathematics. Even lower percentages of students in third through tenth grades are meeting growth projections in English language arts. Building leader and teacher Interviews identified efforts that have resulted in pockets of improvement for delivering best practice instruction to yield student expected performance based upon these results. However, the superintendent's overview presentation identified that strategic plan academic goals were not met.

Common English Language Arts (ELA) assessments in elementary provide evidence of assessments that are both reliable and communicated to students and their parents. High school students explained that teachers identify learning objectives by placing curriculum standards on the board and using them to link new learning to previous chapters. Elementary parents receive assessment results and explained they use PowerSchool to see the overall grades for their child as well as looking into individual assignments. Parents of both elementary and secondary students report being regularly informed via email, Google classroom, and Skyward. Classroom DOJO is an additional communication tool used in elementary grades. High school teachers were reported by students to be "good at making sure we are on top of things, even if we don't go to them for extra help." One student explained, "Instead of just giving me back a test on which I had done poorly, to do over, the teacher sat down and talked with me so I understood." The Teacher Evaluation rubric delineates teacher engagement in the area "checks for

understanding” with specifics ranging from highly effective to ineffective practice. Implementing data collection processes to monitor the use of highly effective practices and their connection to student academic performance could be useful in targeting specific practices needing modeling and or coaching for implementation with fidelity.

Formal and structured professional development opportunities include the Summer Pro series that focused on NWEA Exact Path, MAP, and Fountas & Pinnell literacy training for which participants were paid \$25 per hour. Staff meetings, monthly departmental meetings and grade level meetings occur on a defined schedule and include data analysis and have been identified during interviews as structures for professional learning collaboration. Interviews indicate corporation approval for teachers, counselors, and administrators’ participation in a wide range of on site and virtual professional development events. All building improvement plans include some identified best practice professional learning needs for next step focus. Interviews at all staff levels confirm a strong commitment to informal collaboration and shared learning. A high value by leadership and principals is placed on organized PLC opportunities. However, there seems to be some disconnect between leadership perceptions and those of teachers and instructional assistant staff. The team assessed a readiness for the implementation of formalized professional learning community training and structures to better impact instructional delivery through best practice.

Leadership and teacher interviews indicate the implementation of some onboarding, induction, or orientation procedures. Open door and informal communication were reported during interviews as mechanisms to support staff. Sunman Elementary School improvement plan specifically references induction activities. Evidence for systematic and ongoing formal staff mentoring was neither provided nor referenced during interviews. Instructional coach positions and programs have been intentionally added for some schools. Professional development plans, school improvement plans, and principal/leadership interviews indicate an intention to continue work begun in 2018-19, prior to COVID, for formalized coaching and professional learning community structures.

The Guiding Coalition for Technology Training Plan for 2017-2022 is extensive and included 1:1 Chromebooks for students and all teaching, administration, and instruction assistant staff. The director talked of looking forward to school level expanded instructional technology integration training focus efforts. The utilization of digital systems has been implemented extensively in the last two years to greatly impact improved operational and communication operations. Destiny electronic library circulation system is in place in all school libraries. Stakeholder interviews all reflect a highly valued use of digital communication and operational technology with an interest in ongoing expansion of newer instructional technology integration. However, data collection, monitoring, and adjustments of digital resources for student learning and teacher professional learning is in an early stage. The team suggests a studied approach to best practice professional learning community processes and protocols by teachers and school leaders would link both the identification and monitoring of best practice instruction to a measurable impact on achievement goal targets.

In conclusion, the Sunman-Dearborn Community Schools leadership team is encouraged to study these themes. Standards ratings, and other information reported can be used to create action plans for continuous improvement. Leaders are urged to plan for reinforcement of the many positive practices which make the corporation unique, track data on improvement efforts to measure impact on student learning and success over time, celebrate the corporation’s positive traits highlighted here and giving accolades to all those who engaged in stakeholder interviews. The continuous improvement journey ensures that powerful practices and opportunities for improvement are planned and monitored with formal steps addressed in both improvement and strategic plans.

## Next Steps

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

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



## Team Roster

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

Team Member Name	Brief Biography (Lead Evaluator Only)
<b>Cecelia Wiar</b> <b>Lead Evaluator</b>	<p>Mrs. Cecelia Wiar contributed to the education of children in Michigan public school systems as a teacher, elementary school principal, junior high assistant principal, and district director of Title I and English as a second language programs. She retired in 2004 and from 2006 to 2016 participated in Michigan’s MIExcel Project designed to assist low performing schools in the use of data and research-based instructional strategies to increase student academic proficiency and school success. Mrs. Wiar received extensive training in coaching, using data for instructional decision-making, and establishing and strengthening professional learning communities. In addition to MIExcel services, she provided consulting and technical support to schools utilizing federal and state grants for supplemental services to target the specific needs of their school populations. Mrs. Wiar earned a B.S. in education and an M.A.T. in reading from Oakland University, an Ed.S. degree in elementary school administration from Michigan State University and completed all doctoral-level coursework in organizational development at Wayne State University. Since 2012, Mrs. Wiar has been a team member or Lead Evaluator for numerous Cognia Engagement Reviews for schools and districts in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Kentucky, Georgia, and Florida.</p>
<b>Jennifer Horvath, Cognia Director of Mid-West Region</b> <b>Associate Lead Evaluator</b>	
<b>Jerry Morgan, Cognia Field Consultant and School Improvement Facilitator</b>	
<b>Brenda Pacey, Retired University of Illinois</b>	

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