



Madison County Board of Education

Huntsville, Alabama

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System Accreditation Engagement Review

214770

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Cognia Continuous Improvement System

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

The findings of the Engagement Review Team are organized by the ratings from the Cognia Performance Standards Diagnostic and the Levels of Impact within the i3 Rubric: Initiate, Improve, and Impact.

Initiate

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

Improve

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

Impact

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

Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

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

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

Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results

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

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

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

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

Leadership Capacity Domain

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

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	4	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:	4	EM:	
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:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	

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

Learning Capacity Domain

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

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

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

Resource Capacity Domain

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

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The 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:	
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:	
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	

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

Assurances

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

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

Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

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

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

Institution IEQ	337.10	CIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33
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Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs, and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, 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.

Based on the evidence provided by the school system and stakeholder interviews conducted by the Cognia Engagement Review Team, several themes emerged under the Impact and Improve levels. The team adhered to the processes and protocols required for System Accreditation to evaluate the school system according to the Cognia Performance Standards. Within this context, the following insights and themes were discovered.

The Madison County Board of Education has established, promoted, and protected a collaborative learning culture to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.

In the overview journey presentation, the superintendent highlighted action words from the mission statement that he believes are alive in the school system: create, support, maximize, expand, and prepare. He also stated he believes that he has “a moral obligation to take feedback from his people to know what we have or have not learned.” It is through the collaborative culture of the system that continuous improvement is nurtured and improved, as was acknowledged by other leaders. Teachers noted that the system utilizes professional development planning through the professional learning community (PLC) process to improve student learning and keeps it at the forefront. PLCs are a primary vehicle for collaboration focused upon identifying and addressing learner needs. Throughout the interviews, leaders, teachers, and students shared a belief that the system supports and celebrates a strong, supportive culture that encourages and honors diversity and community. A principal stated that the structure of the system allows his school to be “more forward-thinking now.” In virtually every interview session of all stakeholder groups, the word “family” was heard in response to, “If you were in a group unfamiliar with Madison County Schools, what would be one word you would use to describe it?” This reflects an organization that is comprised of stakeholders working together to advance community values and purpose. The team noted that leaders and staff engage and empower internal and external stakeholders to influence learning priorities using two-way communication in “making it all about the students.” In reading the executive summary and extensive documentation, focusing on the superintendent's overview journey presentation and interaction with more than 200 stakeholders, it was apparent to the team that the system works diligently to create a collaborative environment where

creativity, innovation, and problem-solving are encouraged. The school system clearly demonstrates a collective commitment to teaching and learning. The system is encouraged to continue to foster the strong collaborative culture that exists at all levels.

The Madison County Board of Education uses a data-driven approach for assessing the system's programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning. In interviews with leaders and staff, the team learned the system consistently gathers, analyzes, and uses data to improve student learning and adjust instructional practices. In its documentation, the system presented an array of formative and summative data used to make individual and program decisions to further learning. The system and schools conduct annual needs assessments to gather multiple stakeholders' insights. It was clear in leader and teacher interviews that they are encouraged and expected to "go back to the data on a routine basis" in the creation of a data mindset. An analysis of the state report card for accountability noted an increase in academic achievement and growth for the years 2016-2019. Leaders provided analytical data highlighting an increase in the system's enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) programs as well as an increase in the number of students reaching qualifying scores in the end-of-course assessments. Nineteen schools have been awarded Lighthouse Blue Ribbon honors, and three schools have received PLC Model School status. Overall, the evidence provided a positive impression of the system focus being data-informed to increase student achievement. The team recognizes efforts at all levels of the system to collect, analyze, and use data with fidelity to inform the best decisions for individual growth and organizational effectiveness. The system is advised to maintain its efforts to drive decisions with high-quality information.

The governing board and leadership team of the Madison County Board of Education adhere to a code of ethics, function within defined roles, and establish and operate under policies and practices that are designed to promote and support system effectiveness. In discussions with the board of education members and leaders, the team learned of expectations for their regular involvement in professional development, both within the organization and at state and national levels. Board members noted that they have a process for adopting policies as needed and reviewing them on a regular basis. A review of the 2021 Code of Conduct, Unexcused Absence Procedures, and Family and Parent Engagement Policy made it clear that the tools exist to guide the maintenance of an environment conducive to learner development. Leaders explained the importance of the new teacher induction program, which was created to retain and support new hires. The superintendent spoke of the system's efforts to hire highly qualified employees for all positions and the importance of their retention. In the interviews with the chief financial officer and department supervisors, it was clear that the finance manual guides budget management. Financial policies and procedures are shared with leadership during administrative meetings. In addition to the team's review and discussion of administrative leadership protocols, teachers and students spoke of opportunities to develop and practice leadership roles. Teachers have opportunities to avail themselves of professional development in administrative courses and workshops as well as practice skills in such activities as department chairpersonships, PLC roles, and activity leadership. The executive summary showed that both current leaders and teachers wishing to become administrators are encouraged to do so through the Excel 21 program. Students have opportunities to develop leadership skills through such programs as the Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), career and technical education (CTE) student organizations, student government, athletics, and clubs. Parents also have opportunities for involvement in activities at the system and school levels. The team commends the system for its intentional efforts to employ highly qualified persons at all levels and provide leadership opportunities for all stakeholders. The team notes that current initiatives are working well and recommends they be maintained in advancing the system's purpose and direction.

The Madison County Board of Education has implemented a consistent and systemic PLC process to develop and implement curriculum based on critical standards that are monitored and adjusted based on data and students' needs. From the overview journey presentation, the team learned that curriculum leadership is largely provided through PLCs. From virtually all internal stakeholders, including the school board, superintendent, system and school leadership, and teachers, PLCs were cited as the critical glue that held common curriculum and practices together. The team learned from leadership that the system purposefully partnered with Solution Tree to implement a multi-year rollout of PLCs by strategically placing schools into cohorts. This clearly gave notice across the system that collaboration is highly valued. In their interviews, leadership shared that school staff participates in appropriate PLCs based on their grade, subject, and/or area of support. System leadership models PLC implementation by conducting leadership PLCs to support school-level leaders. The system has been recognized for having several schools receive the honor of being PLC Model Schools. By strategically planning this initiative, school stakeholders report common foci, practices, and language used across the system to develop and implement curriculum. A consistent unit plan template is used to develop lessons around critical standards. The detailed unit plans capture prerequisite and extension skills to meet all learners' needs, establish learning targets, align resources, identify academic vocabulary, and include common formative assessments to monitor learning. PLCs use common formative assessment data alongside benchmark data to adjust lessons based on student performance. School employees report weekly PLC meetings to ensure instruction is delivered in a cohesive and equitable way across schools. The Whole Child Approach, introduced in the executive summary and discussed with leadership, appears to complement PLC attention to individual learners with its three focus areas of Health and Safe Systems of Support, Engaged Environments, and Supportive and Challenging Instruction. The team recommends that the system continue to develop, support, monitor, and adjust collaborative strategies in furthering learning and instruction.

The Madison County Board of Education lacks a clear formalized process for supervision and evaluation across the system. In their interviews, school board members and the superintendent spoke of formal evaluation processes for themselves that are conducted annually. In attempting to determine a process for others, most specifically teachers, the team was not able to establish such formal evaluations consistently conducted across the system. In their interviews, teachers generally could not verbalize how they were monitored and evaluated by leadership at either the system or school levels. School staff mentioned walkthroughs but were not able to describe how those are related to individual teacher evaluations. It also appeared that walkthrough feedback did not follow a system protocol. The system lacked evidence in Workspace to assist the team in recognizing clear criteria on how teachers are observed and provided evaluative feedback. For teachers to have the knowledge and skills needed for guiding student performance and organizational effectiveness, it is critical to have staff establish professional and individual goals, preferably in collaboration with their supervisors. Timely formal evaluations include observation of teaching skills and review of goals, followed by feedback to inform instructional improvement. In their interviews, the team learned about the formal teaching onboarding, induction, and mentoring for first- and second-year staff. Leaders and teachers spoke of the value of such support as one is starting in the profession. The team advises that formal evaluation processes and procedures be a part of the system mantra of high expectation.

The Madison County Board of Education has been engaged in strategic and long-range planning firmly rooted in its beliefs, vision, and mission in providing a roadmap for the instructional and operational practices of the system. In the overview journey presentation, the superintendent informed the team of the extensive formal strategic planning process in which the system had been engaged. He noted the considerable internal and external community involvement from all sectors of the system in the plan's development. School board members spoke to the diligence of monitoring the plan

regularly and adjusting it as needed, usually annually. While the overview journey highlights major capital improvement projects completed in the last five years, the executive summary shares information on the demographic study conducted to project facility needs for the next five to ten years. System leaders spoke of strategic decisions being made in an orderly, inclusive process. Finance personnel explained a formal budget process that is managed to maximize services for students. While some allocations to the schools are based upon enrollments, principals shared that they have opportunities to request additional allocations based upon need. System and school leadership confirmed that, while funding is limited, fairness is in question. As stated in the overview journey presentation, "The use of our funds is strongly protected to provide for the needs of our students." The team recognizes the system on its incorporation of a breadth of internal and external involvement in its strategic and long-range planning processes, as well as the transparency with which it administers operations. It advises that current protocols be maintained with fidelity.

The Madison County Board of Education is to be commended for many excellent programs and practices that are being provided for its learners, their families, and staff. The team wishes the system the best on its journey of continuous improvement. It is expected that these insights may provide some guidance as the system considers next steps on focus in addressing its mission "to create and support high-quality public schools that maximize student achievement, expand student opportunities, and prepare graduates for success in a globally competitive world."

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)
John Sedey, Lead Evaluator	<p>John Sedey has been a teacher, school and district administrator, and educational consultant. Since retiring from public school administration, he has been in private practice, primarily consulting to an intermediate school district, a community college, three alternative schools, and four charter schools. He has been the executive director of an education non-profit corporation. John has provided leadership to career and technical education, guidance and social services, assessment and testing, student data systems, alternative education, state and federal program administration, education-business partnerships, and environmental education. He has been a senior developer for one of eleven New American Schools Development projects. In his advocacy for college and career readiness, he has consulted with federal and state departments of education. John holds a bachelor's degree in history and business, a master's degree in education administration, and has done additional graduate work, including as a Bush Public School Executive Fellow. He has led more than 150 Cognia reviews in 32 states in the past ten years.</p>
Kelly Bonds, Associate Lead Evaluator, Instructional Coach for ELA and Social Studies	
Anissa Ball, Team Member, Administrator of Student Services, System Test Coordinator, At-Risk Coordinator	
Edward Cox, Team Member, Special Education Director	
Cortney Dilgard, Team Member, Director of Curriculum	
Ashley Walls, Team Member, Director of Teaching and Learning	

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