



Cognia Diagnostic Review Report

Results for:
South Carolina Whitmore School

April 19–22, 2021

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Introduction

The Cognia Diagnostic Review is conducted by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the research aligned to Cognia Performance Standards. The Diagnostic Review process is designed to energize and equip the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address areas that may be hindering efforts to reach those desired performance levels. The Diagnostic Review is a rigorous process that includes an in-depth examination of evidence and relevant performance data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

Standards help delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, institution effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. Cognia Performance Standards were developed by a committee composed of educators from the fields of practice, research, and policy. These talented leaders applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that define institutional quality and guide continuous improvement.

When this institution was evaluated, the Diagnostic Review Team used an identified subset of the Cognia Performance Standards and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality. Using the evidence they gathered, the Diagnostic Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report.

As a part of the Diagnostic Review, stakeholders were interviewed by members of the Diagnostic Review Team about their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's learning environment and organizational effectiveness. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidence and data to support the findings of the Diagnostic Review. The following table lists the numbers of interviewed representatives of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Groups	Number
Charter Authorizer Representatives	3
District-Level Administrators	1
Building-Level Administrators	6
Professional Support Staff (e.g., Counselor, Media Specialist, Technology Coordinator)	9
Certified Staff	20
Noncertified Staff	0
Students	2
Parents	1
Total	42

Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results

The Cognia Standards Diagnostic was used by the Diagnostic Review Team to evaluate the institution's effectiveness based on the Cognia's Performance Standards identified as essential for realizing growth and sustainable improvement in underperforming schools. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity**, and **Resource Capacity**. Point values are established within the diagnostic, and a percentage of the points earned by the institution for each Essential Standard is calculated. Results are reported within four categories: Impacting, Improving, Initiating, and Insufficient. The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

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 Essential Standards		Rating
1.1	The institution commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.	Impacting
1.3	The institution engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	Improving
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Improving
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.	Insufficient
1.7	Leaders implement operational process and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	Improving
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the institution's purpose and direction.	Initiating
1.9	The institution provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.	Initiating
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.	Impacting
1.11	Leaders utilize ethical marketing and communication processes.	Initiating

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 Essential Standards		Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the institution.	Improving
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Insufficient
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Initiating
2.6	The institution implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.	Insufficient
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the institution's learning expectations.	Improving
2.9	The institution implements, evaluates, and monitors processes to identify and address the specialized social, emotional, developmental, and academic needs of students.	Improving
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Impacting
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	Insufficient
2.12	The institution implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	Impacting

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 that 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 Essential Standards		Rating
3.1	The institution plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the institution's effectiveness.	Insufficient
3.2	The institution's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Insufficient
3.4	The institution attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the institution's purpose and direction.	Improving
3.7	The institution demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the institution's purpose and direction.	Impacting
3.8	The institution allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the institution's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Impacting
3.9	The institution provides an effective Learning Management System (LMS).	Initiating
3.10	The institution's technology infrastructure supports teaching, learning, and operational effectiveness.	Impacting

Cognia Observation Tool for Digital Learning

The Diagnostic Review Team used the Cognia Observation Tool for Digital Learning, which provides a format for reviewing five major key areas of the digital environment: Instructional Design, Learning Engagement, Platforms and Technologies, Assessment for Learning, and the Digital Learning Community. The tool provided the contextual framework for the team in conducting classroom observations, whether synchronously or asynchronously, and established a common language for team discussion. Additionally, these five areas (with their accompanying indicators) provided support for the team as they interviewed leaders, teachers, and students about the digital learning of your school.

The 2-D Learning Rubric focuses on the instructional delivery with the key areas from a two-dimensional (2D) perspective that measures the Learning Environments and Learning Experiences. The 2-D Learning Rubric identifies the percentage of scores that fall into nine possible cells and will serve as a baseline for the educational provider's continuous improvement journey. The ratings and averages are in support of the findings of the Diagnostic Review Team. The results of the observation tool will also be posted in Workspace for additional access. The Learning Experiences are categorized as Digitize, Enhance, and Innovation. Learning Environments are categorized as Silos, Connects, and Interconnectivity. The relationship between the experience and the environment is then rated.

These data support the team's findings and your own review of your program. Scores derived from these observations have no mathematical impact on the final ratings of any of the Standards. They, in fact, support the areas of strength and needs for improvement identified in this report.



Cognia Observation Tool for Digital Learning						Institution	Cognia Average
Instructional Design: Instruction is designed to promote interactive engagement with personalized academic content.	HE	EV	SE	NE	NA	2.25	2.53
A1 Learners have access to appropriately challenging curriculum (providing rigor, relevance, and fostering positive relationships).	0%	31%	38%	31%	0%	2.00	2.92
A2 Learners engage in a competency-based curriculum.	0%	92%	8%	0%	0%	2.92	2.80
A3 Instructional design incorporates evidence-based strategies appropriate for digital learning environments.	0%	62%	38%	0%	0%	2.62	2.56
A4 Instruction is designed to encourage collaboration with peers and mentors in meeting high learning expectations.	0%	23%	62%	15%	0%	2.08	1.97
A5 Learners demonstrate work that reflects the high expectations of the instructional design.	0%	0%	62%	38%	0%	1.62	2.41
Learning Engagement: Dynamic learning environments support interactive engagement to create personalized learning experiences.	HE	EV	SE	NE	NA	2.10	2.24
B1 The mentors and learners collaborate on personalized learning experiences that provide equity in learner voice and choice (e.g., competencies, rigor, time, place, and pace).	0%	38%	62%	0%	0%	2.38	2.31
B2 Learners engage in rigorous learning experiences, including interaction between peers and mentors and the use of higher-order thinking skills.	0%	8%	62%	31%	0%	1.77	2.12
B3 Learner interactions with peers, mentors, and the academic content permeate the digital environment.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	2.00	2.09
B4 Learners make connections from the digital learning environment to real-life experiences.	0%	46%	31%	23%	0%	2.23	2.43
Platforms and Technologies: Technology platforms are dynamic and enable innovative interactions between mentors and learners in support of personalized learning pathways.	HE	EV	SE	NE	NA	2.32	2.35
C1 Learners have equal access to resources in a Learning Management System (LMS) or Content Management System (CMS) to enable classroom discussions, activities, digital tools, and support.	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	3.00	3.04
C2 Learners use digital resources to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning.	0%	69%	31%	0%	0%	2.69	2.50

Cognia Observation Tool for Digital Learning						Institution	Cognia Average
C3 Learners use digital resources to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning.	0%	8%	92%	0%	0%	2.08	2.24
C4 Learners use digital platforms to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning.	0%	54%	38%	8%	0%	2.46	2.17
C5 Learners and mentors engage in interactive digital platforms that have capacity to support new technologies (e.g., adaptive technology, technology-enhanced items, virtual reality, or augmented reality).	0%	0%	38%	62%	0%	1.38	1.82
Assessment for Learning: Assessment for learning promotes the development of learning goals, support and progress monitoring, and student ownership of the learning process.	HE	EV	SE	NE	NA	2.49	2.26
D1 Learners engage in a process that includes goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection on learning with support from mentors.	0%	62%	31%	8%	0%	2.54	2.18
D2 Learners engage consistently in active communication (static and dynamic) with mentors about their learning goals.	0%	69%	31%	0%	0%	2.69	2.30
D3 Learners engage in the coaching process with their mentors in their progress toward learning goals.	8%	15%	54%	23%	0%	2.08	2.20
D4 Learners take responsibility in the creation and attainment of their learning goals.	0%	62%	31%	8%	0%	2.54	2.17
D5 Learners engage consistently in active feedback (static and dynamic) with mentors.	0%	62%	38%	0%	0%	2.62	2.44
Digital Learning Community: The community promotes positive interactions and relationships between and among learners and mentors.	HE	EV	SE	NE	NA	2.10	2.18
E1 Learners are engaged in promoting digital citizenship and a culture of connectedness.	0%	38%	46%	15%	0%	2.23	2.18
E2 Learners communicate and interact respectfully with mentor(s) and each other.	0%	69%	31%	0%	0%	2.69	2.65
E3 Learners and mentors have opportunities to develop empathy and respect for personal and sociocultural differences among members within the community.	8%	8%	0%	85%	0%	1.38	1.75
E4 Learners and mentors have opportunities to build a sense of community by fostering positive relationships (peer to peer, peer to adult, adult to adult).	0%	15%	77%	8%	0%	2.08	2.14

		2-D Learning Rubric		
Learning Environments	Interconnectivity	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Connects	36.9%	23.1%	0.0%
	Silos	38.5%	1.5%	0.0%
		Digitize	Enhance	Innovation

Observation Data Narrative

The Diagnostic Review Team conducted 13 observations via the learning management system (LMS). The team used Zoom's screen share feature so that stakeholders could share computer screens and provide a virtual walkthrough of the LMS and discuss their daily routines within the systems. A student explained the daily workload and the preferred order of school day events and discussed the system's limitations. The team also reviewed artifacts (i.e., Genius), showing planned updates within the new LMS.

The school did not provide synchronous learning opportunities for students. The school's framework is built to allow learner interaction with the curriculum and LMS at a time, place, and pace of their choosing. The school was not configured by class or groups of students on any student- or parent-facing views; therefore, no opportunities existed for students to interact with one another during school. Students interacted through tools such as the LMS Teacher Messenger feature and other communication methods employed through the school. These features allow the student to ask questions, submit partial or complete work, and receive feedback from their assigned teacher. The teacher, in turn, can grade and provide feedback to the student to help them improve their grades. The school allowed students three resubmission opportunities to raise their grades.

The LMS and the current digital curriculum emerged as areas of concern, especially because these serve as the school's foundational technological structure. Interview data with the administration team members and several

teachers indicated that these concerns are well-known, and the school has been aware of the concerns for some time. Additional artifact review and interview data showcased a strong, thoughtful plan to replace the LMS and student information system (SIS) and integrate a new digital curriculum (i.e., Edgenuity).

One of the main concerns addressed with the LMS was the lack of useful student data provided to the school for analysis. To address this concern, leadership transferred a staff member from the role of teacher to data scientist and subsequently built out a PowerBI database to ingest many forms of student data. This system was updated twice weekly and provided specific student engagement and academic performance data; however, the academic data were high level and not frequently used by the individual teachers interviewed by the team.

Data revealed that in 100 percent of observations it was evident/highly evident that "Learners have equal access to resources in a Learning Management System (LMS) or Content Management System (CMS) to enable classroom discussions, activities, digital tools, and support" (C1). The LMS is the hub of the entire school, with students and staff accessing the system daily. Every interviewed stakeholder understood the system and its features and answered questions from the team. Unfortunately, the team interviewed two students and one parent, which did not give the team a good sample of students and parents enrolled in the school. Before the Diagnostic Review, the team requested additional observations with these two stakeholder groups, but the school did not provide these opportunities during the Diagnostic Review process.

As noted in the 2-D Learning Rubric, the system and school structures were not built for collaboration among students; rather, these were designed for two-way communication with teachers. Students had the option to have a live conversation with their teacher by selecting one of the open office hour time slots. Signing up was made simple for students by building it into the LMS classroom screen. According to interviews and observation feedback, the rate of completed live conversations varied and was inconsistent. Math and science teachers had more student sign-ups compared to their English language arts and social studies counterparts. As such, the system and school structure remained siloed, as seen by 40 percent of observations.

The team found one area where the observations and interviews did not align. It was evident/highly evident in 92 percent of observations that "Learners engage in a competency-based curriculum" (A2). Evidenced through interviews, teachers and administrators noted that there were instances where the competency-based aspects of the curriculum were overridden in a way to keep students progressing through the curriculum. When the school was launched, there was an 80 percent threshold, which ensured mastery of a topic. The school since lowered that number to 60 percent as one stakeholder explained, "This number more closely aligns to state expectations." Throughout the interviews, the team heard examples of moving students ahead as low as 20 percent, because they were not progressing through the curriculum quickly enough. The rigor and subsequent depths of knowledge are not exposing certain students to the appropriate content according to the South Carolina College-and Career-Ready Standards.

Findings

Improvement Priorities

Improvement priorities are developed to enhance the capacity of the institution to reach a higher level of performance and reflect the areas identified by the Diagnostic Review Team to have the greatest impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

Improvement Priority #1

Implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness. (Standard 1.6)

Evidence

Student Performance Data:

On March 27, 2020, the United States Department of Education approved South Carolina's request to waive the SC-Ready (i.e., statewide spring assessment), accountability ratings, and specific reporting requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for 2019-2020 due to widespread school closures related to the coronavirus pandemic.

As detailed in an addendum to this report, student performance data showed graduation rates consistently increased since the school's inception. Starting in 2012, the school had a graduation rate of 10.8 percent, which steadily grew to the most recent year's rate of 54.3 percent in 2020. Each year this metric trended upward, with the most significant jump occurring between the 2018 and 2019 school years with an increase of 11.6 percentage points. Through the interview process, the team discovered that several internal processes and procedures were updated that affected the graduation rate. The most frequently cited reason for this increase was lowered expectations in relation to the mastery-based student requirements.

The school offers the End-of-Course assessments four times annually. With open enrollment throughout the school year, students are constantly starting and finishing their course work, creating additional testing opportunities. The student academic outcomes showed mixed results when comparing the school to the state's percentage of students scoring 70 or above on the End-of-Course Examination Program (EOCEP) in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. While Algebra I and English I remained similar each year for the state and the school, Biology and U.S. History revealed different stories, especially when compared to the state.

The percentage of students scoring 70 or above in Biology in the state decreased 5.1 percentage points while the school decreased 7.1 percentage points from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019. The school underperformed the state by 19.5 percentage points in 2018-2019. In U.S. History, the state's average scores decreased 1.2 percentage points while the school's scores increased 15.4 percentage points during the same time. This large jump in U.S. History was enough to close the gap with the state and lead to the school outperforming the state's average by 4.8 percentage points in 2018-2019.

Classroom Observation Data:

The structure of South Carolina Whitmore School (SCWS) has been purposefully built in a fully asynchronous structure where no student-to-student interactions can occur. Most teacher and student two-way communication and interaction is completed through teacher feedback to students about submission of work. This feedback is the only method for delivery of instruction from the teacher to the student. As evidenced through observation data, the feedback process is inconsistent in structure, depth of support for student work resubmission, and administrator oversight and guidance.

It was evident/highly evident in 23 percent of observations that "Instruction is designed to encourage collaboration with peers and mentors in meeting high learning expectations" (A4). While the system was designed for student-to-teacher communication, the teacher-to-student feedback was inconsistent. While there were few opportunities for live instruction, the feedback process was the main tool used for instructional attempts. It was evident/highly evident in 16 percent of observations that "Learners and mentors have opportunities to develop empathy and respect for personal and sociocultural differences among members within the community" (E3).

It was evident/highly evident in eight percent of observations that "Learners use digital resources to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning" (C3). The school's structure and dated digital curriculum are rigid in terms of allowing students to showcase their creativity in their work. The school created opportunities outside of academic coursework to allow students to submit their artwork. In some instances, the school purchased the works of art and showcased them in different manners.

When considering the large increase in U.S. History compared to other courses and the state's performance, the team found that the history department's review of the curriculum and subsequent collaborative teamwork on aligning the curriculum aided the academic shift. While other teams did similar reviews and realignment of the curriculum, the internal department processes were inconsistent, as evidenced by student academic performance.

Stakeholder Interview Data:

Teacher interviews revealed that informal feedback from the administration is provided occasionally in the LMS in the student-directed feedback. Stakeholders shared that the informal feedback was randomly selected from within their class and reviewed by the school leaders. Interview data showed that one stakeholder's formal observation from the school administration was based on a single recording of a one-on-one Google Meet with a student needing assistance. Several stakeholders affiliated with a credit-bearing course shared that they were not evaluated by school leadership in any consistent manner. Additionally, they had not received annual formal observations. Interview data indicated that some teachers had only had one formal observation while employed with SCWS.

Two full-time employees indicated that they were not evaluated through the use of the South Carolina evaluation tools (4.0, GBE, SLO). One of these individuals participated in an end-of-year meeting with an administrative team member to review their goals and progress. The staff participated in the 15Five software for goal tracking and positive reinforcements. The administration referred the team to this document for questions about staff observations. Evidence supported that there was no indication that feedback was provided from the administration team to certified staff regarding the academic nature in support of student outcomes. No other written supervision or evaluation process or plan was provided during the interviews at the school. The few goals reviewed by the team were non-academic and non-instructional in nature.

The school invested time and effort from multiple stakeholders to study the LMS and digital curriculum. They reviewed new technology options, platform upgrades, teacher and student experience areas, and updated curriculum to provide an enhanced experience. Several evaluation methods were implemented, which included tracking of data sources, and feedback from parents, students, staff, and administrators. While the team agreed that this project review was a strength of the school leader and the administration team, the same care and effort was not put into evaluating their human capital, teacher feedback responses, or other common instructional practices.

Stakeholder Perception/Experience Data:

When comparing stakeholder survey and interview data, the team found several discrepancies. Survey data indicated that 85 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "The school's leaders hold all staff members accountable for student learning" (D6); however, interview data revealed that teachers were not held accountable for increasing academic mastery but were accountable for student's progression through the curriculum. Many stakeholders stated that progress and academic learning are synonymous but then express their reduction of required progress to sub-60 percent levels. In some instances, the teachers would completely

change the assignment, instructions, or requirements to help students pass that section. This was described as differentiation for students, but it was frequently used as a method to reduce the academic rigor for struggling learners.

The survey data also indicated 87 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "School leaders regularly evaluate staff members on criteria designed to improve teaching and learning" (D7); however, the team found no evidence to show that formal and informal administration observations occurred. In addition, many part-time staff communicated they were never formally observed. One stakeholder shared that she had no interactions with anyone from the school, except individuals in the department, in more than 18 months.

Much of the feedback from administrators to teachers involved a sentence or two with the main goal of encouraging the staff and building the school culture. No quality feedback supporting teacher effectiveness (in relation to academic quality) was shared in the interviews or found during the artifact review. This contradicts information included in the staff survey that indicated 76 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that the school's leaders ensure "All staff members use supervisory feedback to improve student learning" (D8). There was, however, feedback provided via the 15Five platform and short thank you notes from the administration to the teaching staff.

These differences should not be taken to mean that the staff and administration do not interact. On the contrary, many interviewees made statements referring to the administration's open-door policy. Many indicated any time a staff member had an idea, it would get consideration. Often staff members were granted approval to try ideas and received funding for staff-selected professional learning opportunities. If the request was denied, stakeholders reported they received a well-thought-out response as to why. This improvement priority is specifically related to academic support, quality observations, and helpful feedback to certified staff about student academic success. Finally, Improvement Priority 1 is not related to students' progression through the course or engagement in the curriculum but rather to the quality of academic rigor provided to the students.

Documents and Artifacts:

While many documents and artifacts were reviewed in relation to this improvement priority, most were related to operational tasks such as Big Data Agenda (April 4, 2021) and Edgenuity Key Integrations, Genius Metrics, and several internal meeting agendas. In relation to the observations of certified staff, the only documentation provided to the team was screen shots and screen shares of 15Five.

Improvement Priority #2

Establish and monitor a process for professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the institution's effectiveness. (Standard 3.1)

Evidence

Student Performance Data:

As detailed in an addendum to this report and discussed in Improvement Priority 1, the student performance data were used to determine Improvement Priority 2. Additional data were found in the school's PowerBI data set in relation to student tracking, encouragement of course completion, and the positive trending graduation rate information.

Classroom Observation Data:

The team conducted classroom observations with a common understanding that professional learning is a process or procedure in which activities are planned and delivered based on data-driven needs assessments and data aggregated from supervision and evaluation processes to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. As discussed in Improvement Priority 1, most of the student-to-teacher interaction occurred within the feedback mechanism on submitted assignments. Additionally, the school was built in a way that teacher-to-student interactions and reviews are intensely singular to that specific student and usually hyper-specific to the submitted assignment. Because of this structure, there was a limited review of compiled student data, rare use of assessment data (as seen in Improvement Priority 3), and limited "big picture" reviews of any individual student outside of the counseling team.

It was evident/highly evident in eight percent of classrooms that "Learners engage in rigorous learning experiences, including interaction between peers and mentors and the use of higher-order thinking skills" (B2). As evidenced through observations, the school has created a culture of supporting and encouraging students to finish their coursework or to continue progressing through their curriculum, but the team found little evidence of rigorous learning experiences or higher-order thinking skills as part of the interactions between teachers and students. Many of the interactions were related to encouraging students to continue working and reviewing the instructions for a better grade on the resubmitted assignment.

Stakeholder Interview Data:

When stakeholders were asked about their experience related to interactions with students through assignment feedback, as noted above in the classroom observation data, many teachers stated they had little to no formal professional learning related to the expectations from SCWS. Several teachers relayed that the only help they received around feedback directed toward students was delivered in their first few months on the job, with little to no support provided thereafter. After asking several teachers and administrators about topics covered in professional development sessions in the last three years, the team found no stakeholder mentioned professional learning related to student feedback.

Additionally, the team found no professional learning opportunities related to reviewing student academic data, differentiating instructional (feedback) practices, or providing innovative learning opportunities. Notably, no sessions were aligned to student academic outcomes. Most of the topics included goal setting, operational and logistical tasks associated with the school, and professional development opportunities with more of a business angle than an academic one.

When asked how professional learning opportunities were selected for the school, three main methods for the selection process were identified. The first method of selecting professional development (PD) sessions was based on the administrative team sending a survey to the entire staff that included questions about areas in which they needed the most support and what types of sessions they would like to see in future in-service. Second, many staff members stated that any time they had a desire for a specific topic, lesson, conference, or course, the administrators usually allowed them to participate and paid for their learning opportunities. One teacher stated,



"We have financial support to attend PD as we desire. I did the Read to Succeed endorsement and was reimbursed by the school." Another mentioned, "I got the GT endorsement, and my tuition was paid." A third teacher stated, "We are encouraged to find our own things." Third, the school used most of the learning opportunities for staff over the most recent school year to train on tools and platforms that are soon to be implemented at the school (i.e., the new LMS and the new digital curriculum).

It is important to note the difference in expectations between full- and part-time teachers, where all professional learning opportunities were only required for full-time teachers. Part-time teachers were provided this information as optional, but it appeared that the part-time teachers rarely participated. Part-time teachers were not expected or required to be in any professional learning, staff meetings, or department meetings.

Both teachers and administrators talked about the Better Lessons professional learning group's sessions from the previous school year. When asked what sessions they enjoyed or which helped most, most teachers responded to the help they received on goal setting and tracking. None of the interviewed staff mentioned academic support as the focus of any sessions received during this time.

Stakeholder Perception/Experience Data:

While staff survey results concluded that 92 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "Leaders support an innovative and collaborative culture" (D3) and interview responses supported these results. The team found insufficient documentation and artifacts to support the staff's professional learning needs. Several interviews revealed that professional development was personal, and there was limited professional learning focused on specific academic outcomes. Additionally, 82 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that the "Professional learning program is designed to build capacity among all professional and support staff members" (E18); however, there was no artifact or documented evidence to support the existence of a comprehensive professional learning plan.

While 87 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "All staff members participate in continuous professional learning based on identified needs of the school" (E17), the team found a lack of professional learning for staff members about reviewing student academic data and using assessment data that drives future academic shifts. One session of professional learning provided to staff members focused on reviewing student data; however, it was non-academic data. The learning opportunity was directly tied to the operational use of the PowerBI system, and the data points were included. As evidenced through observation and interview feedback, the only academic data points included and reviewed were benchmark data where the landing page provided only a snapshot view of how students performed at a singular point in time. Several teachers were asked how these benchmark data were useful to them, and many responded with sentiments that the data were only useful during the first few weeks of school for determining where the students were academically. If needed, teachers could remove tasks from low-scoring students' assignments to ensure they could continue progression through the curriculum. Many teachers no longer reviewed data in the PowerBI system this late into the school year. One teacher was unsure, when questioned, if the data were for the fall administration or the spring administration. In addition, the teacher was asked whether these data had ever been shared in comparison to an additional data point to determine student progress. The teacher replied, "Oh, I don't think I've ever seen that, but that would be interesting."

As mentioned earlier in the stakeholder interview section, there is evidence that new staff members are supported. The survey results indicated that 87 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that a "A formal process is in place to support new staff members in their professional practice" (E16). Many new staff members said they were provided assistance in understanding the processes and procedures.

Documents and Artifacts:

The Diagnostic Review Team reviewed the evidence as noted above in Improvement Priority 1, interview data, the professional learning agendas from the past 18 months, and artifacts found in the eProve Workspace. The team also spent time reviewing the March 26, 2021 Inservice Agenda-Edgenuity Training.



Improvement Priority #3

Gather and analyze data and use findings from formative and summative assessments to determine student progress and to drive instructional adjustments. (Standard 2.11)

Evidence:

Student Performance Data:

The student performance data, as detailed in an addendum to this report, were used to determine Improvement Priority 3. Furthermore, the SCWS end-of-course (EOC) data review, the pacing guides for the courses, and school analysis of the graduation rate were contemplated. Additional data considered can be found in the addendum of this report.

Classroom Observation Data:

Classroom observation data, as detailed previously in this report, showed that learners who “have equal access to resources in a Learning Management System (LMS) or Content Management System (CMS) to enable classroom discussions, activities, digital tools, and support” (C1) was evident/highly evident in 100 percent of observations. While the structure is online and available for all students to access what they need, the school uses very little student data in their decision-making processes. They have a robust review of a handful of data points related to progress within the course, submissions from students, and compliance data points to hold teachers and staff accountable for student interactions via feedback.

The team observed examples of teacher feedback, including one teacher who responded to student work with the complete feedback response of, “Note the lab report was what was needed here and for your next post as well.” Another stated, “I’ve marked this unqualified. Complete the lab report to finish and earn the next day’s attendance credit. Okay?” Additionally, another replied “Hope you had a nice weekend. I see you documented your sources with MLA format. Good job.” Finally, another stated, “Thanks for turning in your assignment, don’t forget the free attendance day on Friday, and start your spring break early by completing the SmarterMeasure assessment.”

The team found limited academic direction or feedback for students. Additionally, there was a lack of feedback that promoted the use of higher-order thinking skills for students and appropriate depth of knowledge levels.

It was evident/highly evident in 31 percent of observations that “Learners have access to appropriately challenging curriculum (providing rigor, relevance, and fostering positive relationships)” (A1). The school realizes that limited data are a byproduct of the dated LMS and digital curriculum, and stakeholders shared their desire to have more data. Of the data points considered by the school, few related to academic outcomes and achievement about the South Carolina College- and Career-Readiness Standards (SCCCR). The learning experiences where students read and responded to low-level questions predominated the current curriculum. In most of the assignments reviewed by team members, there were occasional connections to activities in real-life experiences ranging from in-depth connections (few) to high-level, scarcely connected real-life topics (more frequent).

The school should consider incorporating formative and summative assessment data to drive revisions of courses and to assist with student feedback. It was evident/highly evident in zero percent of classroom observations that “Learners demonstrate work that reflects the high expectations of the instructional design” (A5). With the addition of the new LMS, new digital courses, and incorporation of data-driven decision-making based on internal assessment data, students’ future success depends on achieving grade- and course-appropriate work. The school can ensure the proper depth of knowledge levels are incorporated for success with South Carolina accountability measures.

Stakeholder Interview Data:

Staff interviews revealed that the new data tool used by the school, PowerBI, is updated two times per week and is used to track students’ attendance in courses, showcase the number of posts, identify the number of days since the last post, inform students’ pacing within the course, and help the school determine if students are on track for



completing courses on time. Teachers stated, "PowerBI is used to see which students are MIA, are flagged for behavior issues, or have IEPs." The data reviewed consistently is more compliance-related and less academic.

Teacher interviews, reviews of department meeting agendas, and discussions did not disclose a process or opportunities for staff to analyze or use coursework, assessment data, or any student academic data to make data-informed decisions about student differentiation or personalized learning. It was stated in one interview that "We're not allowed to have PLCs (professional learning communities) at this school." When the school administration was asked about this, the team was not provided with an explanation as to why PLCs were not allowed. Further investigation into this revealed that some parts of a traditional PLC were supposed to be included in department meetings. Further questions about department meetings also indicated that they occur monthly, and several teachers stated they have had their department meetings canceled due to lack of topics to cover. There was no mechanism in place for teachers to review student data individually or in groups.

Interview data indicated that staff members had access to assessment data both from their internal benchmark tests and the South Carolina End-of-Course (EOC) assessments. The team was unable to find examples in interviews or artifacts that displayed teacher evaluation results. Additionally, the team found no observation instrument that focused on academic assessment data and how to use data to alter the teacher's feedback. One school leader stated that the EOC results were used to provide guidance for the EOC review sessions held by teachers, but the average teacher interview did not indicate knowledge of this practice.

One reason provided in an interview was because of the format of the school and the fact that the work is mastery-based. One student may work more quickly than another student and get ahead of the pacing guides. Some students need more time and fall behind. Shortly after the year starts, a group of students assigned to a teacher works in different lessons within the course, and there are frequent times in the latter part of the year where no students are working on the same quiz, assignment, or activity. Because of this, it was difficult for stakeholders to look at multiple students' data in a comprehensive format.

The school tracks student attendance, pacing, and graduation rates. It was evident in teacher interviews that the staff is aware of the issue of the school's low graduation rate. Most staff members had a general sense of the current status and could talk through their specific task for helping to raise the graduation rate.

The data analysis was so strong in this area that the administration even agreed to hire additional people (i.e., academic coaches and graduation coaches) to support meeting this goal. Interestingly, the academic coaches hired were not brought in to raise academic outcomes but instead to ensure students continued working through the course. One academic coach made a statement about reducing the academic requirements for the students to ensure they stayed on track to finish their course within the school year. Another academic coach joined the interview Zoom meeting while completing another job at a different employer during the school day. The main tasks these academic coaches were responsible for included tracking student absences and the number of students' posts that were submitted and contacting students and parents to provide individual support to at-risk students.

The student interviews indicated that an average day consisted of reading, watching videos in some courses, and then answering questions to earn daily attendance stars. If the students received enough stars, they would get financial benefits in the form of \$25 checks mailed to their homes. The administration team detailed the practice as cheaper than hiring more people to encourage students to attend and continue working. This process appears to be, in part, helping with the graduation rate, but there is no academic data being considered when using this format to drive student success. Additionally, the student expectation was reduced from 80 percent mastery down to 60 percent mastery for movement to the next lesson. This shift was credited by both teachers and administrators to more students progressing in their pacing and completing courses.

Stakeholder Perception/Experience Data:



The Diagnostic Review Team analyzed stakeholder survey data from parents, students, and staff members. Data indicated that 95 percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "School leaders monitor data related to student achievement" (G6). The school looks at a lot of data related to students' progress and submission of assignments; however, the school should be providing opportunities to review assessment and student academic data as well.

There is a disconnect regarding the use of assessment data to make data-driven decisions, as evidenced by 71 percent of staff members that agreed/strongly agreed that "All teachers in our school use multiple types of assessments to modify instruction and to revise the curriculum" (E7). The interview data revealed that most staff members looked at student data; however, there was little attention to assessment data. The team found no instances of teacher feedback that showed instruction had been modified based on academic data outside of the submitted assignment. The staff updated the curriculum every two to three years. Most staff members had completed some course updates within the preceding three years, but few made updates within the last year. This may be in part due to transitioning from the current curriculum to a new digital curriculum next school year.

Eighty-four percent of staff members agreed/strongly agreed that "All teachers in our school monitor and adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on data from student assessments and examination of professional practice" (E1). Interview data showed that staff members changed their feedback to each individual student based on the student's personalized needs. The team found limited examples of substantive feedback that indicated instruction reached a deep depth of knowledge level. While some of the lesson questions were updated, the interview data suggested that the new questions were not built at a higher level of thinking. Rather, questions were often simplified for student understanding.

Documents and Artifacts:

The Diagnostic Review Team reviewed documents and artifacts provided by the school but could not confirm the school consistently used data-driven decision-making techniques related to student academic data. The team reviewed content area lessons in the LMS, including activities, passages, questions, and videos. The principal presentation was data heavy but light on academic data usage other than a point-in-time assessment results and non-academic indicators, such as graduation rate and subsequent trend and enrollment trends over time. No formal data analysis was provided related to students' academic performance. The team also reviewed an EOC recorded review lesson where no evidence showed how or when it was adjusted based on the EOC academic results.

Insights from the Review

The Diagnostic Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs, and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, examples of programs, and practices and provide direction for the institution's continuous improvement efforts. The insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team deliberations and provide information about the team's analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution within the **Levels of Impact of Engagement, Implementation, Results, Sustainability, and Embeddedness**.

Engagement is the level of involvement and frequency with which stakeholders are engaged in the desired practices, processes, or programs within the institution. **Implementation** is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are monitored and adjusted for quality and fidelity of implementation. **Results** represent the collection, analysis, and use of data and evidence to demonstrate attaining the desired result(s). **Sustainability** is results achieved consistently to demonstrate growth and improvement over time (minimum of three years). **Embeddedness** is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are deeply ingrained in the culture and operation of the institution.

Strengths

The Diagnostic Review Team identified several strengths where the school is excelling. First, while the school is receiving this review due to its graduation rate, it has consistently trended in an upward trajectory for the entirety of the school's existence. It is closing the gap with the state and emerging in the correct direction to meet the South Carolina expectations. One significant support of this goal and another strength of the school can be found in the graduation coaches and their efforts to ensure students are working toward graduation.

Next, the school has performed well on the ACT. In fact, the school outperformed the state in the 2019-2020 school year on the Composite Average Scale Score by 1.1. Analysis across subjects during the same year indicated that South Carolina Whitmore School (SCWS) outperformed the state in English by 2.3, reading by 3.5, and science by 1.2. In math, they scored 0.8 lower than the state average. When comparing the Composite school score from 2017-2018 to 2019-2020, SCWS made gains in all four content areas and the Average Composite Scale Score.

Looking at data and making decisions is a strength of the school, as shown by the process for reviewing the systems and structures in place against what the school believes will help them succeed in the future. The school invested a lot of time, effort, and manpower into reviewing new LMS options and different digital curriculums and considering what they want. They had systems in place to review these metrics, processes in place to request stakeholder feedback, and a mechanism to review all data, options, and feedback. Additionally, they built a full implementation structure to ensure that the staff, students, and parents were prepared to make a move over the summer by instituting pilot programs, training sessions, and incredibly deep Gantt Charts, which reviewed all associated timetables.

Continuous Improvement Process:

The Diagnostic Review team interviewed two students and one parent. As such, the majority of the interview notes are from teachers and school administrators.

While the school established a siloed format, allowing only one student to interact with one teacher in the course, the Diagnostic Review Team noted the low observation scores concerning collaboration. Some scores included in the observation section of this report may be artificially inflated because students collaborated closely with some teachers but rarely, if ever, with other students.

Considering those collaborative times with students, the teachers at SCWS were not making data-driven decisions as they composed their feedback responses. Little academic data were available, and it was not reviewed to guide teaching and learning. Because of this lack of academic data from assessments aligned to



state standards, the teacher feedback was compliance-focused and lacked scholastic depth to drive student performance scores higher. The school is comfortable looking at data and doing basic analyses; therefore, the next step of adding academic data to their repertoire should be attainable within a short period.

To ensure new data are useful and practical, the team suggests to the school that implementing appropriate schoolwide professional learning about reviewing, analyzing, and using findings to adjust feedback (i.e., instruction) should be considered. The team found no professional learning opportunities provided within the recent two years that informed the school about data on the digital infrastructure. Current learning opportunities did not include academic feedback to help students work at advanced depths of knowledge levels and engage in critical thinking.

Finally, the school does not currently have a consistent model of evaluating teacher feedback or reviewing data or needs for future professional learning of the school. The creation of a customized formal observation tool was nonexistent for the unique structure and format of the school. The few areas reviewed by the administrative team did not regularly, either formally or informally, observe most staff members or provide feedback on how to improve their feedback to students. Additionally, this should become one of the data points that the school leaders track and use to adjust their feedback as noted in need of additional academic data mentioned above.

Next Steps

The results of the Diagnostic Review provide the next step for guiding the improvement journey of the institution with their 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 Diagnostic Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on current improvement efforts and adapting and adjusting their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

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

- Review and share the findings with stakeholders.
- Develop plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the Diagnostic 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.

Team Roster

Diagnostic Review Teams comprise professionals with varied backgrounds and professional experiences. All Lead Evaluators and Diagnostic 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 Diagnostic Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Chase Eskelsen	Chase Eskelsen began his educational career as an administrator at a virtual charter school. He then worked with a local ISD to launch a full-time online district program. He supported the growth efforts of each of the campuses (grades 3-12) and helped create an operational foundation for success before transitioning to the National Academy Policy and Government Affairs team where he supported online and blended schools nationwide. He also served as the national director of board and partner relations. Mr. Eskelsen now leads an education non-profit. The team has been tasked by their board to launch or partner for development of new and innovative school models. They have opened three new schools, two hybrid and one full-time online, during his time with the organization. Mr. Eskelsen has his Master's in School Administration and wrote his thesis on the topic of education policy for virtual school programs.
James Peterson	James Peterson has over 40 years of experience as an educator. He taught social studies at the middle school in Darlington County School District for 21 years and taught history for three years at the high school in Florence School District 1, both of which are located in South Carolina. James also has over 20 years of experience in coaching. He was the high school varsity baseball coach and junior varsity football coach. He also has served as the athletic director at the high school and junior high school. James has 14 years of experience as an administrator, serving as an assistant principal and principal. He is currently a Transformation Coach with the South Carolina State Department of Education. James received his bachelor's degree in history from Benedict College and his master's degree in administration and supervision.
Lisa Duda	Lisa Duda currently works as a Regional Support Coach with the South Carolina Department of Education in the Office of School Transformation. She has been in the field of education for the past 28 years, serving as an elementary classroom teacher, literacy coach, and instructional coach. Additionally, she served as the lead director of an integrated arts school, a curriculum and instruction specialist K-12 and an academic team leader for instruction at the district level. Lisa's educational leadership skills, grounded in evidence-based research, have led to systematic and sustainable practices yielding positive impacts on school improvement.
Ashley Owings	Ashley Owings is the executive director of Odyssey Online Learning in Chapin, SC. Her experience includes serving as a general education teacher, special education teacher, and high school principal. She holds a bachelor's degree with a concentration in early childhood, elementary education, a master's degree in education, a master's degree in multi-categorical disabilities, and certification in administration.

Addenda

Student Performance Data

Percentages of students scoring at 70 or above on the End-of-Course Examination Program (EOCEP) (2017-2018, 2018-2019)

Content Area	% School (18-19)	% State (18-19)	% School (17-18)	% State (17-18)
Algebra I	42.8	54.9	42.0	60.5
English I	53.4	56.3	46.6	53.9
Biology	34.9	54.4	42.0	59.5
U.S. History	52.5	47.7	37.1	48.9

Graduation rates

	% School 2020	% State 2020	% School 2019	% State 2019	% School 2018	% State 2018
Graduation rate	54.3	82.2	52.6	81.1	40.6	81.0

ACT average score for students in grade 11 (2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020)

Content Area	Composite School (19-20)	Composite State (19-20)	Composite School (18-19)	Composite State (18-19)	Composite School (17-18)	Composite State (17-18)
Composite Avg Scale Score	19.2	18.1	17.0	18.6	17.3	19.0
English	19.2	16.9	15.9	17.5	16.1	18.0
Math	17.2	18.0	16.3	18.5	16.9	18.8
Reading	21.2	18.7	17.7	19.0	18.0	19.3
Science	18.8	18.4	17.6	18.7	17.7	19.2

Schedule

Monday, April 19, 2021

Time	Event	Where	Who
7:45 a.m.	Team Prep Meeting	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
8:00 a.m.– 9:00 a.m.	Principal Presentation	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
9:00 a.m.– 10:00 a.m.	School Format Walkthrough	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
10:00 a.m.– 4:00 p.m.	Interviews / Stakeholder Interviews / Artifact Review	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.	Team Work Session #1	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

Time	Event	Where	Who
8:30 a.m.	Team Prep Meeting	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
9:00 a.m.– 4:00 p.m.	Interviews / Stakeholder Interviews / Artifact Review	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Team Work Session #2	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Time	Event	Where	Who
8:00 a.m.	Team Prep Meeting	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
8:15 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Interviews / Stakeholder Interviews / Artifact Review	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Team Work Session #3	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team

Thursday, April 22, 2021



Time	Event	Where	Who
8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Final Team Work Session	Zoom	Diagnostic Review Team