



Cognia Update

Back in the early summer, we reported in this newsletter about the high praise we received for our Cognia accreditation work, very ably led by **Foothills Regional Director for Continuous Improvement, Todd Nickelsen**. At that time, we noted that Foothills had received the following scores from Cognia:

For the Required Analyses—Stakeholder Feedback, Student Performance, and Learning Environment: Foothills received a perfect 4-star rating on 11 of the 12 criteria.

For the Key Characteristics—Culture of Learning, Leadership for Learning, Engagement of Learning, and Growth in Learning: Foothills received a perfect 4-star rating in 15 of the 16 criteria.

As we stated then, it was hard to do much better than that. We subsequently received our Accreditation Index of Educational Quality of (IEQ), earning a score of 323—far ahead of Cognia’s IEQ average of 253.

Fast-forward a few months, and—not surprisingly—Todd was asked to present at the Cognia Conference, which was held in Atlanta this month.

A key theme of our Cognia work throughout the process is that accreditation work must be closely tied and aligned with ongoing school improvement work at every level. Todd introduced his presentation, which he entitled *A Practitioner’s Guide to Accreditation and How it Can Work Seamlessly With Your Continuous Process*, with these remarks:

“Although accreditation comes around 5-6 years, the continuous improvement cycle is ongoing. Oftentimes when a school or system is up for accreditation, they adjust their existing practices to prepare for the visit, which ends up feeling like everyone is doing ‘something more.’ If the improvement cycle is continuous, then preparing for accreditation should just be one stop along that cycle. When you think of C.O.G.N.I.A as being a Collaboration, Ongoing, Genuine, Necessary, Interconnected & Achievable process you can embed the accreditation work into your existing planning. The purpose of this session is to show you how you can leverage your stakeholders and existing structures and practices to authentically integrate accreditation requirements like the Cognia Performance Standards and the three areas of required analysis (Student Performance, Learning Environment, and Stakeholder Surveys) into your strategic planning and continuous improvement cycle (including Federal Program requirements). You will walk away with strategies, ideas, and tools you can use to connect the accreditation requirements with the work you are already doing.”

Message from the Superintendent

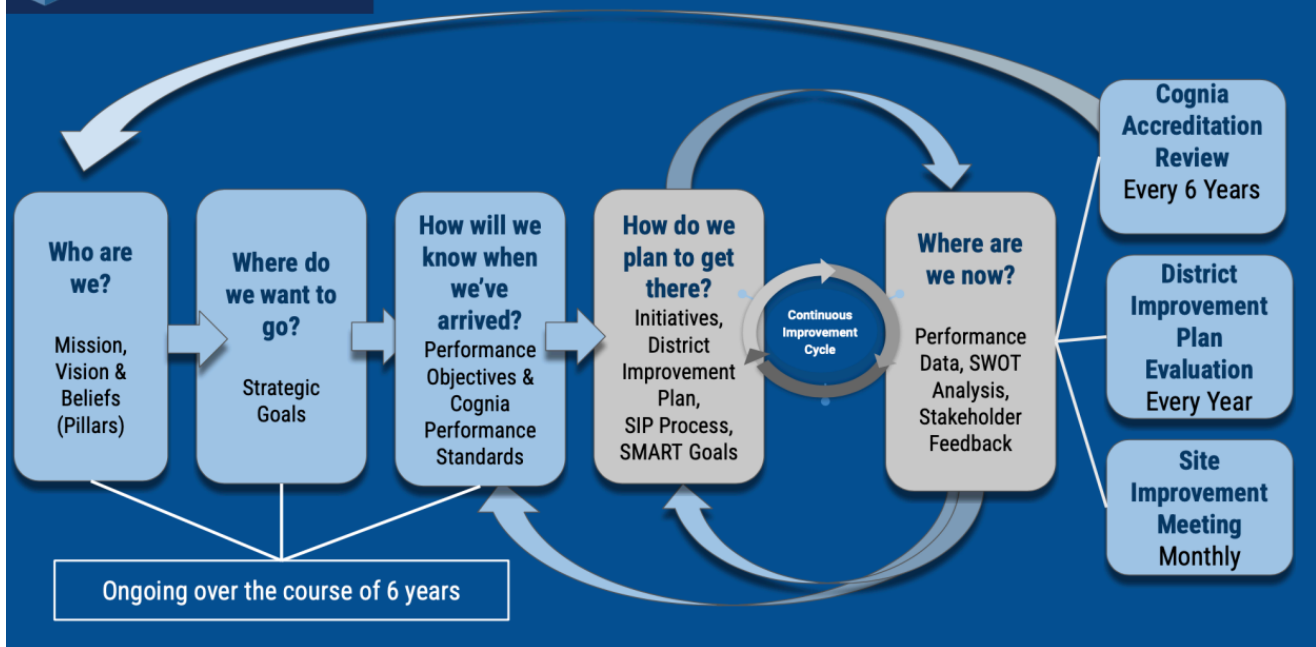
I am pleased and proud of Foothills and Todd Nickelsen for being honored—deservedly so!—by being invited to present at the Cognia Conference in Atlanta. The Cognia Accreditation plan is part of our systemic approach to school improvement.

With this foremost in my mind, and as a part of the Franklin Covey Institute GSSA leadership assignment, I asked all Foothills Regional Departments—including Curriculum and Instruction, CTAE, Student Services, Special Education, Finance and Human Resources, and Operations—to develop and share their plans for supporting our overall Strategic Plan, working with our Four Core Belief Pillars of College and Career Readiness, Supportive Culture, Organizational Effectiveness, and Community Collaboration. These important, collaborative efforts are truly exciting! - **Sherrie**

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Strategic Planning & the Continuous Improvement Cycle



Referencing the chart, above, that we have used as our “road map” over the past few years, Todd reminded the audience that “Accreditation is not about one moment in time every 5-6 years. It’s about the journey your organization is taking to continually improve.”

Using the “C.O.G.N.I.A.” acronym, here are some key takeaways from Todd’s presentation:

C—Collaborative

- Collaborate and communicate regularly with your lead evaluator.
- Interdepartmental effort—think cross-functional monitoring, Title I requirements, schoolwide improvement plans, and more.
- Start with your governance board and maintain their involvement.
- Embed Cognia Accreditation discussions into existing meetings—cabinet, faculty, principal, instructional coaches, etc.
- Include all stakeholders.

O—Ongoing

- Not a moment in time—an ongoing journey.
- Where are we going? Use a Cognia aligned roadmap.
- How do we know we’re on course? Strategic mid-year and end-of-year checks. Review of observations, SIP meeting data review.
- Where are we going now? Comprehensive professional learning plan, action research, detailed timeline.



The Foothills Vision

Foothills Regional High School strives to be an accessible, high-quality high school option that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the People of Georgia and its communities.

G—Genuine

- Share your journey, tell your story.
- Own your areas of improvement.
- Integrate accreditation requirements into your existing improvement efforts.
- Use the Cognia Performance Standards to generate rich discussions about your organization.

N—Necessary

- Non-Essentialist vs. Essentialist.
- Prioritizing and focusing our efforts: “Essentialism is not about how to get more things done. It’s about how to get the right things done. It doesn’t mean doing less for the sake of less either. It is about making the wisest possible investment of your time and energy in order to operate at our highest point of contribution by doing only what is necessary.” *Gregg McKeown*
- How does this relate to how we combine and integrate our school improvement goals and efforts?

I—Interconnected

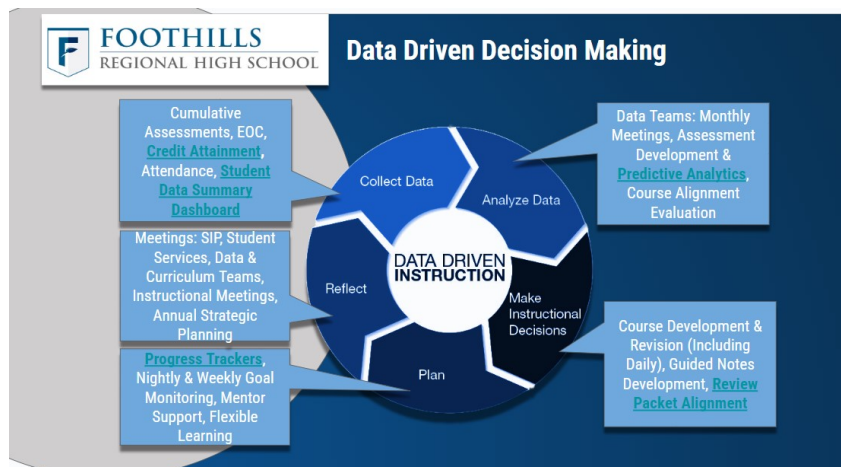
- Find and embrace the connections to the work you are already doing.

A—Achievable

- Make sure your team has the bandwidth, support, and resources to fully implement your plan

The Foothills continuous school improvement process includes:

- Consistent/running agendas
- SIP team members
- Regional Office support
- Shared goals—
 - ⇒ **Graduation Rate/Course Completion**
 - ⇒ **EOC Performance/Weighted Content Mastery**
- Monthly data and discussions—
 - ⇒ 4 or fewer credits earned
 - ⇒ Total credits earned by students in the current month
 - ⇒ EOC and cumulative assessment data
 - ⇒ Average daily attendance
 - ⇒ Current and anticipated number of graduates



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