



# Clarke County School System

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Athens, Georgia

**January 26-28, 2020**

**Special Review Report**

**215148**

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# Special Review Report

## Introduction and Context

This Cognia™ Special Review Report presents the findings of the Special Review Team. The purpose of the Special Review conducted on January 26-28, 2020, of the Clarke County School District (CCSD) in Athens, Georgia, was in response to complaints and allegations against the district. The complaints from community stakeholders allege that the conduct of some members of the Board of Education is interfering with the Board's ability to function responsibly and effectively as a Board. Additionally, the complaints allege that the board member conduct is impeding the autonomy of the district leadership to meet goals for achievement and instruction in addition to effective management of day-to-day operations of the district. The following items are summarized examples of the concerns expressed by the complainants:

### Select Board of Education Members:

- Demonstrate lack of knowledge of board policies and law. Their actions during board meetings and outside of board meetings place the school district in possible violation of Board Policies.
- Exhibit lack of understanding of their purview, role and responsibilities as individual members of a Board of Education and as a Board as a whole. As such, their actions have impacted the effectiveness of the district leadership and the day-to-day operations of the district.
- Are influenced by special interest groups that are satisfied with the low student performance of some groups of students thereby support inequitable opportunities and expectations for learning across all student groups.

The nature of the complaints received by Cognia suggested that the district may not be adhering to selected *Cognia Performance Standards for School Systems*, as listed within this report. This report is organized around those cited Accreditation Standards.

## Activities of the Special Review Team

In preparation for the Special Review, the review team reviewed the district's written responses submitted to Cognia to the alleged complaints, current website information, recordings of board meetings, and documentation as provided by the district via eProve™ workspace. During the review, the team engaged in the following activities:

- Individual meetings with the Interim Superintendent, district level administrative cabinet members, eight current board members, and two former board members. All of these meetings were interviews conducted with the individuals throughout the first day of the review at the district office complex or by telephone when in-person sessions were not possible. Each board member was interviewed by two review team members as were the groups of teachers and principals. Each of the cabinet level staff members were interviewed by the Lead Evaluator.
- Interviews with stakeholders representing teachers from across the district and principals of buildings not visited by team members. The team visited Cedar Shoals High School, Coile Middle School, and Barrow Elementary School on Tuesday morning of the review. Although *Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool* (eleot®) observations were not conducted, classroom visits were made in an effort to gauge teacher preparedness, student interaction, student behavior, and building academic aesthetics. The Team interviewed seven additional principals and eleven teachers from schools across the district representing all levels.



- Evidence review consisted of 55 videos containing board meetings, work sessions, and special called meetings that were split among team members to view prior to the on-site review. The team reviewed select copies of agendas and corresponding minutes of the recordings.

## Findings

The Special Review Team's findings are organized by each cited Standard. For each Standard, the Special Review Team provides a rating followed by a Summary of Findings. Priorities for Improvement and Directives are provided for any Standard rated as *Insufficient* or *Initiating*. Recommendations are provided for any Standard rated as *Improving* or *Impacting*. The findings of the Special Review Team are reported within four ranges identified by the colors below:

Color	Rating	Description
Red	Insufficient	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts
Yellow	Initiating	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Green	Improving	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards
Blue	Impacting	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations

## Special Review Report

Leadership Capacity Standard		Rating
<b>Standard Number</b> 1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	<b>Initiating</b>

### Improvement Priority 1

- **Develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive professional development plan for board members to include orientation sessions for new board members, whole board training on the roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent, and an annual written commitment to adhere to the Code of Ethics.**

### Findings

A review of the Policy Manual for the Clarke County School District revealed a comprehensive collection of policies that are all accessible to the general public via the district's website. Included in the compilation of policies was Policy BDC: Policy Adoption which provides clear guidance on the processes for presenting, reviewing, and adopting policies. The work of the Board in the area of policy development is handled through a committee structure. To support the work of the Board in this area, the district also has identified a key staff member who operates in the role of the Chief of Policy and Support Services and who also is a member of the superintendent's cabinet.

Even though the team found the board policy manual readily available, it became apparent through interviews and the review of video recordings of board meetings that members do not always adhere to policies they have established and adopted. Policy BC outlines guidance for setting the agenda for regular meetings and the process for amending the agenda, if needed. According to the policies of the CCSD, "the agenda for regular meetings of the Board of Education shall be discussed at the board work session and

approved at the regular board meeting.” Further, the policy clearly states that potential agenda items or presentations should be submitted to the superintendent seven (7) days prior to the work session. Agenda items may be added to the meeting listing if “the item is time sensitive and approved by a majority of the board members present.” However, a video recording of the board meeting held on August 29, 2019 (<https://youtu.be/ZNf7fQ9eqCc>) revealed a very lengthy dialogue that started with a motion to amend the agenda to add a discussion on selecting a spokesperson to address the media pertaining to the AdvancED (Cognia) complaint. The activities that took place in addressing the motion based on time stamps from the recording were as follows:

- (0:32) Original motion is made.
- Discussion on “Should we change the rule?” Reference is made to a policy that was currently being reviewed identifying the president or a designee as the spokesperson.
- The question is raised, “Should we go ahead and open this up for discussion before acting on the motion?”
- Another reference is made to the existing board policy on “News Releases” indicating such information should come from the president.
- (5:45) The determination was made to go ahead and take a vote on whether the Board should amend the agenda to add the item for discussion.
- There is further discussion on the proposed amendment to the agenda.
- (6:26) A vote is taken on amending the agenda to include discussion on the item resulting in a 5:4 vote to amend the agenda. The president announces the motion had passed and the item would be added to the agenda for discussion. Another board member indicates a 2/3 vote is needed to amend the agenda.
- (7:06) The board president announced the motion to amend the agenda had not passed.
- (7:22) A vote is taken to approve the agenda. The discussion to identify a spokesperson is not an item on the approved agenda even though it did pass by a majority vote as required by board policy. Ironically, it was clearly evident that discussion on the item still occurred, even though no action was taken, prior to the vote to amend the agenda for discussion.

At the same August 29, 2019, meeting, a series of actions and discussions occurred that included tense conversations involving board members, the superintendent, and the Board’s attorney regarding hiring an outside legal counsel to respond to the AdvancED (Cognia) complaint. The ensuing acts of the Board raised questions about adherence to policy as well as following Roberts Rules of Order in conducting business. This series of actions that occurred is described below with time stamps from the video recording.

- (8:40) A board member states he wants to “make a sub to a sub to a sub to the sub” to propose a Resolution from the Board be added to the agenda. He proceeded to explain the rationale behind the Resolution and the need for outside counsel.
- (13:42) The statement is made that Item #4 on the agenda was for the Board to discuss the AdvancED (Cognia) complaint and referenced nothing about a Resolution to hire an outside counsel.
- (14:26) A board member discusses the superintendent’s response regarding legal counsel as it pertains to the AdvancED (Cognia) complaint.
- (15:50) The school board attorney shares he had been approached by someone in the community and asked, “Do you represent the Board or the superintendent?”
- (17:31) The original board member who initiated the conversation about the Resolution states he had sent an email to a representative of the Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) inquiring if GSBA would provide an attorney to represent the CCSS in the AdvancED (Cognia) matter.
- (23:20) Board member reads the context of the email to GSBA representative inquiring about hiring special counsel. The response indicated GSBA would not provide a lawyer, and if the school board chose to seek outside counsel it would be at the district’s expense.
- (23:48) Another board member calls for a “point of order.”
- (24:26) The board president overrules the “point of order.”
- (25:35) The original board member who called for the “point of order” appealed the president’s overruling.



- (26:45) There was a second to the appeal of the overruling of the “point of order.” Subsequently, the floor was opened for discussion, based on the “point of order” on whether a board member should approach GSBA as an individual on behalf of the Board or is it a case of just “seeking information.”
- (32:47) A vote is taken on the appeal to the overruling of the “point of order.” The appeal did not pass based on the vote.
- (33:42) Discussion on the Resolution resumes.
- (40:16) A motion is made and seconded to adopt the Resolution. The board president asked if the group could take a ten-minute break to “read and digest” the Resolution. A board member states he could read the Resolution orally so everyone could know the contents.
- (45:32) The board member who called for the point of order reads a passage on the roles and responsibilities of board members.
- (46:50) The Board adjourns for a ten-minute recess.
- (47:02) The floor is reopened for discussion on the Resolution.
- (50:35) The superintendent states that the letter from AdvancED (Cognia) indicates the superintendent should respond to the complaint and that the only recourse the Board could exercise was to “respond to my response.”
- (53:45) The superintendent states the process for responding to AdvancED (Cognia) would be that he will work with his staff to develop a response with plans to share a draft copy with the Board at the September 12 meeting. He then states that he has to submit his response to AdvancED (Cognia) by September 13. He further states that even if the Board passes the Resolution, he has no plans to make a recommendation to the Board to hire an outside counsel noting the policy that all recommendations for hiring should come from the superintendent.
- (1:10:24) A board member responds this is the first time he has ever heard of a resolution being passed by a Board and the superintendent ignores it.
- (1:11:02) The board member who initiated the conversation about the Resolution indicates he would like to move on with the vote.
- (1:13:40) The board chair indicates she would like to share the “context for where she is” and states, “I am very saddened we are at this point.” She goes on to state she was not at a point to adopt a Resolution that she was seeing for the first time. The Board engages in more discussion about the Resolution.
- (1:33:35) There was a motion and a second to proceed with the vote on the Resolution.
- (1:34:06) The Board votes on adopting the Resolution. The motion carries by a vote of 5:4.

The conversations during the board meeting indicate members were not introduced to the Resolution during the previously scheduled work session and that the actions of amending the agenda to include discussion of the Resolution violated board policy. The actual Resolution also posed a potential violation of Policy BH: Code of Ethics which states, board members shall “recognize that the authority of the board rests only with the board as a whole and not with individual board members and act accordingly.” In the case of the Resolution, one board member, without the prior knowledge or approval of the Board, contacted a representative from GSBA inquiring about the rationale and expense of acquiring an external legal counsel to write a response to the AdvancED (Cognia) communication regarding potential violation of governance policies.

During interviews, stakeholders described board work sessions using descriptive words such “embarrassing”, “sad”, and “scary.” They acknowledged the work sessions as an opportunity to ask questions and to clarify understanding of the key issues to be voted on within the regular meeting. However, they went on to say that because of the chaotic demeanor of most work sessions, board members then come to the regular board meeting and appear to be unprepared for the meeting or misinformed regarding items on the agenda and spend needless time asking questions and engaging in discussions that should have occurred during the work sessions. Members of the stakeholder group shared that it seems as if board members have not read materials ahead of time. In discussing the Board’s adherence to policies, stakeholders communicated that while they felt CCSD has good board policies and a Code of Ethics, they were not being fully implemented by the Board as a whole.



A review of the October 3, 2019 work session (<https://youtu.be/WpVDdcfKJ4s>) included a discussion about the work of the GSBA as part of an already established relationship with the CCSS. The board president outlined four areas the GSBA is covering in its work. These areas included reviewing all policies outlined in Section B, enhancing members' knowledge of the policies in the governance section of the manual, sharing sample copies of norms from other boards of education, and developing a set of norms for the CCSD board. Even though work has already begun through the partnership with GSBA, evidence revealed a need to not just review Section B of the manual but also closely review and update the policy manual as a whole. A random sampling of policies in various sections of the CCSS policy manual showed many policies were very outdated, some with revision dates that were over 37 years ago. Examples of some of these policies include:

- Policy CB: Administrative Personnel Ethics; Adopted Nov. 12, 1987, no revision date
- Policy CFA: Superintendent Qualifications; Adopted Nov. 12, 1987, no revision date
- Policy EGAG: Unemployment Compensation; Adopted Dec. 13, 1979, Revised Oct. 10, 2002
- Policy GCB: Classified Personnel Positions; Adopted Aug. 11, 1983, Revised Nov. 12, 1987
- Policy JGF (2): Seclusion or Restraint of Students; Adopted Jan. 20, 2011
- Policy KN: Awards and Scholarships; Adopted Jan. 8, 1979, Revised Aug. 11, 1983

Even though Policy BDA outlines the steps for policy development, including adopting, revising, and rescinding board policies, a further examination of the district's policy manual revealed no established timeline for reviewing and/or revising the manual to ensure the inclusion of relevant and timely guidance to better promote consistency and transparency as well as adherence to state law.

**Directives:**

- Revise the policy manual to ensure that all system policies are current and adhere to state law when applicable.
- Provide regular professional learning sessions concerning board policy topics that will help with effectiveness and efficiency of board meetings.
- All board members should receive training on proper board member participation with an emphasis on using Robert's Rules of Order to streamline processes.
- Conduct a self-assessment twice per year; utilize results from the self-assessment to identify additional professional development needs.
- Establish a means to routinely gather, analyze, and use stakeholder perception data on the effectiveness of board members to support continuous improvement.
- Engage school board members in ongoing team building sessions to enhance communication, transparency, and trust.

Leadership Capacity Standard		Rating
<b>Standard Number</b> 1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	<b>Insufficient</b>

**Improvement Priority 2**

- **Review the Code of Ethics to develop and implement a plan of accountability to ensure adherence of all board members in order to execute the roles and responsibilities of board members and manage board functions effectively and efficiently.**

**Findings**

The Clarke County Board of Education consists of nine school board members that are elected on staggered four-year terms. Some of the board members are fairly new to their position. They have been appointed to

their position or newly elected and currently have not served a full four-year term as board members. Even though the Board has new members, it will be important for them moving forward to ensure their approved policies (BAB, BBB, BH, etc.) are implemented and monitored for effective board governance and accountability.

The Board Code of Ethics, Policy BH, which is very similar to the sample provided to local boards as a resource on the Georgia Department of Education (<https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/Pages/Local-Board-Governance.aspx>) was adopted by the Board on June 11, 1992 and last reviewed on October 11, 2018. It is important to note that this website also contains information and resource guides for effective Georgia Local School Board Governance in the following areas:

- Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems
- Code of Ethics
- Conflict of Interest
- Training Requirements
- Key documents and/or required forms for local boards

The Board Code of Ethics consists of seven domains (Governance Structure, Strategic Planning, Board and Community Relations, Policy Development, Board Meetings, Personnel, and Financial Resources) as well as sections on Board Member Conduct and Conflicts of Interest.

During interviews with board members, the review team noticed that there was an inconsistency regarding board member awareness of Policy BH. They acknowledged that while there is an approved Code of Ethics for board members, it is not being followed with fidelity by all board members. Some stated that board members should review the Code of Ethics annually although it was not currently being done. It was also shared that this practice needed to be explained because it was not the understanding of every board member that reviewing and signing the Board Code of Ethics was required annually.

Additionally, newly named and veteran board members shared their concerns with the team during interviews about their fellow board members' conduct and how their conduct did not align with their current board-approved Code of Ethics. They also shared the need for additional board training on the Code of Ethics because of the different interpretation(s) of the policy by some board members. As referenced in *Domain I: Governance Structure* of the Code of Ethics, the board chairman's letter on January 23, 2020, referenced that there had been isolated transgressions of individual board members inadvertently crossing the line into the day-to-day operations of CCSD. Additionally, during interviews with board members, it was evident that this problem still exists, and other issues within other Domains of the Board Code of Ethics were noted. Although the Board has recognized the need for additional professional development and/or training sessions regarding the Code of Ethics and the Board's roles and responsibilities as referenced during the *Board Work Session on October 3, 2019* (<https://youtu.be/WpVDdcfKJ4s>), it will be essential for the Board to take the elements of this training very seriously to ensure the Board's success and most importantly the successful outcomes of the students of Clarke County School System. In addition, the team viewed several recordings of board meetings, dating from *January 3, 2019, through January 9, 2020*, where the board members seemed confused at times on how to conduct meetings, were unclear about key policies related to their decision-making, and demonstrated infighting among themselves. Training is essential in this area for the Board's success.

Clarke County School Board Policy BAB entitled, *School Board Governance*, was adopted on August 9, 2018. The policy states within the introduction that "The Clarke County School District Board of Education shall develop and maintain standards that are to be used as an evaluation tool. The Board Standards should assist the Board in developing a picture of where they have been, based on their goals in future years." It is the consensus of the team that while the standards within Policy BAB can lead to the Board operating in an effective and efficient manner, it is vital that each board member makes a commitment and is dedicated to implementing each standard appropriately. Furthermore, they must demonstrate to stakeholders that there is a high level of understanding of each standard to ensure the district provides exemplary educational opportunities for all students and staff members as well as establish a sense of trust among stakeholders for the Board. During interviews, several board members referenced or shared with members of the team copies of the *Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems*. Some of them even shared that they



had received training on the standards. These research-based standards can also support the Board’s goal to ensure “good stewardship of funds, demonstrate ethical behavior, and plan for support system-wide student achievement of accepted standards” as referenced within the introduction of the standards. During the Board Meeting on November 7, 2019, there are several occasions where the Board expresses the desire for developing and understanding norms, ethical procedures, and their roles and responsibilities to operate as an effective Board:

- (2:56:52) Board member makes the following comment on norms and procedures: “As a board and working out the norms, since I’ve come on this board, it’s been pretty obvious there isn’t a lot of agreement from among all board members, many of which are new about the norms.”
- (3:08:00) Board commenting on working on norms and with the Georgia School Board Association (GSBA).
- (3:18:00) Board member commenting on the Board knowing their roles: “I think it’s important for us to at least know what our role as board members, because if we don’t, it’ll interfere with the operations of the school district.”
- (3:18:45) Board member commenting: “once we have norms it will be a great first step”.

Therefore, whole board governance training on each set of standards can provide the board guidance in performing their duties in a professional manner and determine effective next steps as this Board continues to come together and functions as a unit.

Finally, based on interviews, the review of documents and recorded board meetings, the team noted the importance of the Board having knowledge and understanding of all appropriate documents and trainings that are required for them to complete in a timely manner. It was stated by board members that they were unsure at times regarding the correct information and/or documents received during new board member orientation because some of the information received was either no longer relevant or outdated. They also shared that at times, they were not sure that all board members received the same information. For example, it is important that every board member understands the importance of the *Georgia Department of Education Compliance Form for Local Board of Education Members* rather than merely signing the form to meet the state requirement. In addition, some of the members were unsure of the required training expectations by the State of Georgia for local boards. While some board members shared that they understood the training requirements, others expressed their interest in having a “refresher” course to make certain they are in compliance with state law.

**Directives:**

- Identify and demonstrate characteristics of a highly effective governing board and professional decorum.
- Conduct, discuss, and document a Board self-study prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year.
- Create and document behavioral and/or productivity objectives, strategies/actions, and evaluation measures based on the results of the Board self-study.
- Provide whole board training session(s) on the *Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems* (2010) and use the information gleaned from the training to support the system’s purpose of improving student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

Leadership Capacity Standard		Rating
<b>Standard Number</b> 1.7	<b>Standard</b> Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	<b>Initiating</b>

**Improvement Priority 3**

- **Review the Board committee structure policy to develop and implement a plan to make certain that Board committee work does not pose potential violations of other board policies as well as state and federal regulations.**



## Findings

Team members viewed a link on the Clarke County School District website that identified a listing of four standing committees that are composed of members of the Board. These included finance, government relations, policy, and property. The link also stated the Board may establish “special (ad hoc) committees from its own membership for study and fact finding.” A review of Policy BBS in the system’s policy manual also restated the titles of the standing committees and further declared that members of each committee are “appointed by the president” and “the president of the board shall be an ex-officio member of all committees.” A review of the existing committee membership rosters revealed many of the standing committees have four names on the listing. With a nine-member board, a majority is constituted when five or more board members are in a gathering at the same time or location. Based on the current committee listing, review team members concluded that if the president attends a committee meeting and all of the members are present, by default, a majority has been established resulting in a potential violation of the *Open Meetings Act*. Interviews revealed that the potential for this occurrence has been more prevalent recently because of the divisive nature of some of the topics board members are discussing at the committee meetings.

Additionally, Policy BBS also lists advisory committees as a part of the system’s committee structure. According to the policy, the advisory committees serve as a means of encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process with membership being determined by board nominations and confirmed by action of the entire Board. The policy even identifies the means for replacing members of the advisory committees if a vacancy occurs, an outline of the charge to be given to the advisory committees and clearly states the committees report directly to the Board. Even though the intent of the presence of advisory committees to encourage stakeholder participation is noble, the formal descriptions of the composition, charge to the members, and procedures for filling vacancies may present the perception that such committees may be serving in more than advisory capacity.

Interviews revealed that the presence of special interest groups in the community who perceive their function as an “advisory” group has sometimes impeded the work of the Board. Team members, during the Special Review, found limited evidence of the presence of advisory committees appointed by the Board. However, the communication dated Sept 13, 2019, submitted to Cognia by the superintendent in response to complaints revealed the perception that, “the challenge related to governance in the Clarke County school District is compounded by special interest groups who have aggressively opposed the Office of the Superintendent’s district reform agenda.” However, these interviews revealed the connection or involvement of some board members in many of these interest groups and those groups “feed information to board members” that may or may not be true. If implemented effectively, advisory committees can serve as a conduit for participation and involvement of the citizenry. However, the Board must be careful to acknowledge these committees are strictly in place to provide an opportunity for all members to get the same feedback before rendering decisions on matters of the district as a conduit to enhancing organizational effectiveness. Members of the Board should also diligently work to ensure their presence and involvement in external interest groups do not impede their function as a member of the Board as a whole and that these special interest groups do not serve in an unofficial advisory capacity.

### Directives

- Develop written procedures to ensure the number of members of board committees does not present the possibility of a quorum being established during the convening of a meeting.
- Utilize the advisory committee structure to effectively gather feedback to help all board members receive the same information prior to rendering decisions.

Learning Capacity Standard		Score
<b>Standard Number</b> 2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	<b>Improving</b>

## Findings



The purpose and direction of the district leadership and approval of the Board were evident at the school levels where a greater emphasis had been placed on staff professional development focusing on the area of inequities in student achievement within the different student subgroups. All schools visited and schools whose principals were interviewed indicated the establishment of equity committees to lead the work of providing equitable opportunities for learning for all students. Although the work in this area brought awareness of achievement gaps to staff and leadership, it also provided a source of divisiveness within some school staff members, some special interest groups and the community at large. Principals shared that they were seeing progress in communicating the gains that were being made at schools until the distraction of district level adversities and the public nature of the amount of discourse between and among board members and the superintendent unfolded.

Three schools were visited by the review team while on-site and an additional seven principals were interviewed by pairs of Special Review Team members. Although eleot observations were not conducted, team members visited classrooms to observe structure, engagement, academic atmosphere, and interactions with students and staff. Each review team group met with building leaders before touring classrooms. Each group reported positive reactions from those three school leader groups when asked about the impact of the Board / superintendent adversarial interactions on the day-to-day operations at the school level. They indicated that their focus continues to remain on organizational effectiveness and continuous improvement to support student and staff success each day.

**Recommendations:**

- Maintain efforts of addressing equity in the schools, setting high expectations for all students, utilizing data to examine success in closing achievement gaps while increasing student achievement, providing professional learning opportunities for educators, etc.
- Ensure participation by the Board in whole board governance training on the Cognia Accreditation Standards and expectations for school systems and schools prior to their next Engagement Review as a proactive measure to make certain they are aware of the updates and information related to their role and responsibility and the importance of district’s continuous improvement journey prior to the next scheduled Engagement Review.

Learning Capacity Standard		Score
<b>Standard Number</b> 2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	<b>Improving</b>

**Findings**

The Clarke County School District engages many stakeholders in gathering and analyzing data although the review team noticed there was limited evidence of how the data are used to demonstrate progress toward increasing student achievement. During teacher interviews, teachers at all levels acknowledged the gathering and analysis of student data, including formative and summative assessments. The data sources include the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), benchmark assessments, Unit Performance Assessments (UPA’s), Georgia Milestones, and End of Course (EOC) assessments. While the teachers informed the team of the wealth of sources they can pull data from, next steps for implementing the use of the data is an area of improvement. One teacher communicated that most teachers have an abundant amount of data to support student success. However, the data are not always meaningful to support student success. For example, it was shared that data did not always help teachers in determining essential interventions to address deficits to close the achievement gap or students’ learning targets. Finally, it was shared by a teacher that presently, teachers have access to multiple sources of data; however, the guidance or application of next steps or how to use the data to significantly support student achievement is not provided to many classroom teachers throughout the district. Many of the school level teachers agreed with

this statement and included details about how data are gathered and analyzed. As of last school year, the district focused more on data and its analysis through school based Professional Learning Communities and collaborative team meetings. Another teacher noted that the current process of data analysis was simply going into a data room with an instructional coach and a school administrator to review the data and discuss what they can do to help students. It was also shared by teachers that in years past, they examined data although a lot times they were taking data and attempting to use it or to just say they looked at data. The practice of gathering and analyzing data has been monitored by the district over the last few years. Though changes within the district to provide more consistency among all schools in these processes were implemented, this is an area that can be enhanced by the district to improve student achievement and educator effectiveness.

In addition, the team found little evidence of how data are used to drive student achievement longitudinally over a three year or longer period. Evidence revealed through documentation and interviews provided the team insight into a new school improvement plan process through a 90-day growth plan that all schools are using. Some teachers acknowledged the new 90-day growth plans provide more frequent changes into the data and under the old school improvement plan there was more opportunity to look at data longitudinally. A teacher commented that one improvement that would assist colleagues and her in examining data would be to make certain the district's curriculum portal is up-to-date. The teacher noted that there are discrepancies in the local assessments, and there had been shifts in beliefs of staff members who are creating the curriculum resource documents. Teachers commented on the recent personnel changes at the district office that had an effect on these processes. Strengthening the process of data analysis through job-embedded professional learning on how to utilize results from both formative and summative assessments will be very beneficial to the district moving forward. Implementing this progression will not only enhance the district's curriculum and instructional programs and best-practices, but it will also support the district's strategic plan of building professional capacity in this area. The processes enabled through the district's support will aid in developing a sustainable practices in increasing student achievement over time. Additionally, expanding the use of data to capture perception, experiential, demographic, and program evaluation data to enhance opportunities for students' success and educator effectiveness will maximize the district's organizational effectiveness.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Strengthen the process of analysis, interpretation, and use of data through job-embedded professional development on how to utilize results from both formative and summative assessments to drive instructional practices.
- Expand the use of data to capture perception, experiential, demographic, and program evaluation data to enhance opportunities for students' success and educator effectiveness.

### **Insights from the Special Review**

The Special Review Team for the Clarke County School District in Athens, Georgia conducted an on-site review to investigate the complaints regarding the impacted Accreditation Standards listed within the communication to the district and in this report. As a result of the special review, the following insights were gained by the review team:

- There is a lack of efficiency in nearly all of the meetings of the Board, as evidenced in several video recordings, where the Board was not focused on continuous improvement of the school district in terms of student achievement.
- The lack of trust among board members and between some board members and the previous superintendent was overshadowing all of the work of the Board and hindering progress toward meeting goals.
- The Code of Ethics as adopted by the Board is not adhered to with fidelity by most board members and should be a strong focus of training with accountability measures put in place to hold each board member individually and corporately responsible for improving public perception of the district leadership and board leadership.



- Adopted policies should be routinely reviewed and revised, as needed, to ensure consistency and adherence to operational practices. Board members should also engage in training to ensure they have knowledge and awareness to effectively follow and support the policies they have approved.

## Accreditation Recommendation

Based on the findings of the Special Review Team, subsequent review by the Cognia Global Commission, and in accordance with Cognia Policies, Cognia concludes that the Clarke County School District be placed on **Accreditation Under Review** in order to address the Priorities for Improvement and to consider all other Recommendations and Directives of the Special Review Team with a Progress Monitoring Review to be scheduled prior to **December 2020**.

## Next Steps

The results of the Special Review provide the next steps to guide the improvement journey of Clarke County School District in their efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. A copy of this report will be sent to the CCSD Interim Superintendent. CCSD shall use the report to guide its response to the findings and its improvement efforts.

Clarke County School District is accountable for addressing the Improvement Priorities identified in this report. Upon receiving the Special Review Report, CCSD must implement the following steps:

- Review and share the findings with stakeholders;
- Develop plans and take action to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the Special Review Team;
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts;
- Schedule and host a Monitoring Review by **December 2020**. The purpose of the Monitoring Review will be to assess the progress made in complying with the Special Review Team's Improvement Priorities;
- Submit an Institutional Progress Report, no less than two weeks prior to the scheduled Monitoring Review. The report should detailing the steps taken, including supporting evidence, to address the Improvement Priorities. A report template will be provided to the institution.

