

Quality Standards

for Early Learning Schools

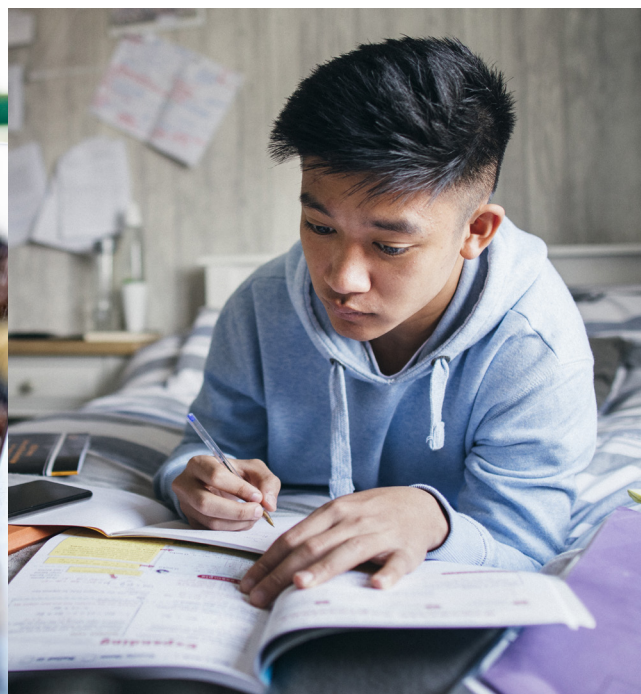


Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Anatomy of a Standard	1
The Standards	2
Standards for the Future	3
Cognia Accreditation Protocols: Performance-Based Models	4
Cognia Early Learning Protocol	5
Summary of Standards and Indicators	6

Introduction

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

—Aristotle

Each and every day, educators in early learning schools around the world seek new ways to help young children learn and grow and reach their greatest potential. No longer are parents and communities satisfied with the minimum requirements. Educators must be prepared to meet this demand and continue to improve as they strive for excellence.

The commitment to continuous improvement is a dynamic effort, consistently requiring attention and revision. Cognia expects this commitment from the educational institutions we serve, and we expect it of ourselves. To that end, once every five years, Cognia reviews, and revises if necessary, the Standards that serve as the foundation of the Cognia Accreditation Process.

These Cognia Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools not only provide the foundation for the Cognia Accreditation Process, but also represent the continued evolution of accreditation as a powerful tool for driving effective practices in support of young children.

About Cognia

The world's leader in accreditation and school improvement, Cognia believes that young children must be prepared to succeed in a constantly-evolving and diverse world and that early learning schools have a deep responsibility to deliver a safe environment and developmentally appropriate quality education to young children from all walks of life.

We have been experts in accreditation and school improvement since 1895, and bring this 100+ years of experience and expertise through three US-based accreditation agencies — the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

The Cognia Accreditation Process, a protocol embraced around the world, is a clear and comprehensive program of evaluation and external review, supported by research-based Standards, and dedicated to helping schools, school systems, corporation systems, and education providers continuously improve.

Cognia is committed to sharing the knowledge and practice generated by schools throughout its global network to inform and influence practice on issues related to education quality.

We believe in the power of education.

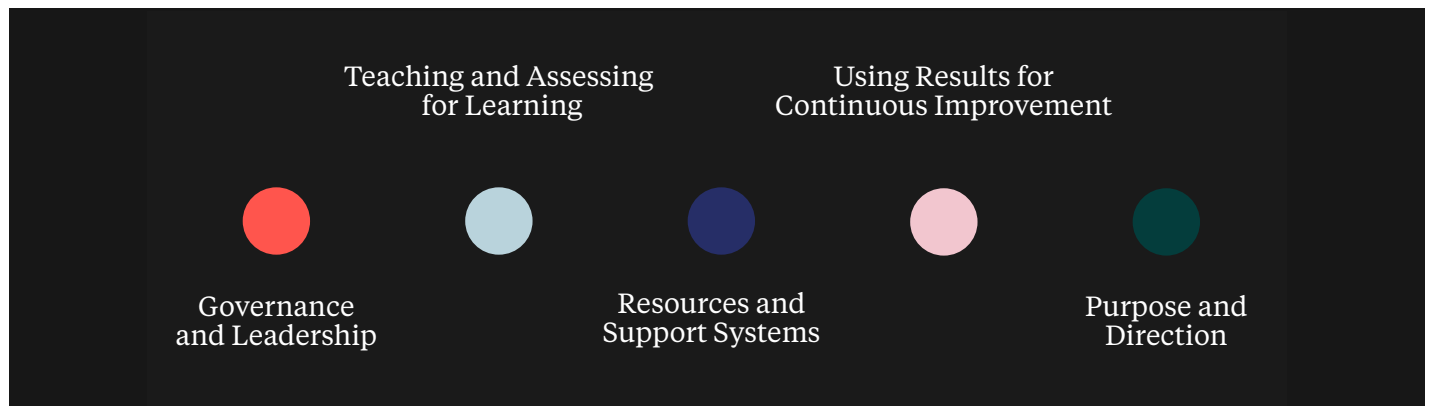
Anatomy of a Standard

Cognia is fervently committed to the care and education of all young children. In that regard, Cognia employs a research and performance-based protocol for early learning schools that commits to the care, education, learning, growth and development of young children. Cognia holds its accredited early learning schools accountable to high quality educational and childcare standards and results supported by an engagement of continuous improvement.

The Cognia Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools provide the foundation for the Cognia Accreditation Process. The Standards also represent the continued evolution of accreditation as a powerful tool for driving effective practices in support of young children.

The Cognia Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools are comprised of Standards, Indicators and Criteria. The Standards are research-based, comprehensive quality statements that describe conditions that are necessary for early learning schools to achieve organizational effectiveness and ensure young children learn and grow. These Standards support an education process that is truly

visionary; characterizing how early learning schools should operate to promote a culture of continuous learning that is fluid – engaging leaders, staff and parents. The Indicators are operational definitions or descriptions of exemplary practices and processes, together providing a comprehensive picture of each Standard. The Indicators will be scored individually through a set of Criteria. These Criteria contain rich, detailed descriptors of what each Indicator looks like in practice. The performance of each early learning school will be rated on each Criteria as “Met” or “Not Met” based on evidence.



Together, the Standards and accompanying Indicators and Criteria focus on childcare and educational best practices within an early learning school that ensure student growth and organizational effectiveness. No one Standard or set of Indicators and Criteria is complete without considering all five as a collective whole. Their inherent connectedness is critical to understanding and application at each early learning school.

The Standards

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to a sense of community and relationships among young children and adults; developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative and physical growth and development; as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, development and care for young children.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support learning, growth and development in young children; family involvement; and school effectiveness.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

The school's curriculum, instructional design and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and the developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development of young children.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

The program has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all children.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The school uses data about the developmentally appropriate learning, growth and development of young children and overall school effectiveness to guide continuous improvement.

Standards for the Future

“We believe education can change the life of a child. We seek to serve extended learning programs that are dedicated to a standards-based approach to quality improvement for the ultimate benefit of their children and youth.”

—Dr. Mark A. Elgart President and CEO Cognia

Through our own commitment to improvement, Cognia revises its Standards to ensure that they remain relevant and current as the foundation of the Cognia Accreditation Process. There are very practical reasons to review the Standards – our knowledge of effective practices changes, and research reveals new information about factors that contribute to student achievement and the learning, growth and development of young children.

However, revising the Standards also opens the door to considering future trends in education and Cognia's own research and findings from the institution visits at the nearly 30,000 accredited schools and school systems that we have conducted over the last five years. Feedback from the field also provided rich experiences and expertise that allowed us to look at creating Standards for the future, not just today.

This rich and deep revision process produced a set of Standards that will challenge early learning schools to commit to the care and educational well-being of young children, to reach higher, to examine closer and to demonstrate the fidelity and integrity of best practices in early learning. The Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools significantly increase the focus on teaching and learning; incorporate 21st Century Skills related to early learning; embed high expectations for professional practice; and focus on developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development, as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, development and care for young children.

Each Indicator has descriptive Criteria, and both schools and the visiting External Review Teams will evaluate the institution against each Indicator, not just the Standards.

Key Educational Concepts in Standards

1. All programs commit to developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development, as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, development and care for school aged children and youth.
2. All programs sustain a learning culture that promotes high levels of engagement, creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.
3. All programs commit to developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development, as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, development and care for school aged children and youth.
4. The program's improvement plan requires identification of goals for improvement of learning and instruction.
5. The governing body operates consistent with established roles and responsibilities; must be ethical and free of conflict of interest.
6. Curriculum, instruction and assessment are adjusted in response to data about children's and youth's progress, needs, interests and strengths.
7. Staff are trained in evaluation, interpretation and use of data.
8. Programs must demonstrate, using data, growth in child and youth learning, and achievement of learning outcomes and program goals.
9. Programs demonstrate effective collaboration with children, youth, families, schools and the community.

Cognia Accreditation Protocols: Performance-Based Models

All Cognia Accreditation Protocols are systematic, systemic and sustainable approaches to improving student performance results over time based on meeting Standards, engaging in continuous improvement and implementing quality assurance. Early learning schools may pursue accreditation as individual schools or as part of a system.

Cognia Early Learning Accreditation for Schools is a researched-based framework that supports the process of accreditation; provides a means to engage in continuous improvement; and involves the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation, reflection and improvement. The process invites external scrutiny and welcomes the constructive feedback of peers. The process demands rigor, is based in data and approaches documentation of results with early learning childcare and educational best practices.

Cognia Early Learning Accreditation for School Systems is a powerful systems approach to improving learning, growth and development of young children as well as organizational effectiveness overtime. School System Accreditation recognizes that supporting children in their learning, growth and development is a result of how well all the parts of the education system—the school or corporation system, early learning school and the learning environments —work together to meet the needs of children. School System Accreditation is used by school districts, corporations and dioceses.

Cognia Early Learning Protocol

The Cognia Early Learning Protocol is grounded in early learning research, incorporates the *Cognia Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools*, and includes both an ongoing Internal Review process and an External Review. Whether engaged in the individual early learning school protocol or the systems protocol, each early learning school will conduct Internal Review and will host an External Review.

Internal Review: The Cognia Protocol employs diagnostic tools for schools to conduct an Internal Review. These reviews are focused on evaluating performance related to the Cognia Standards, Indicators, Criteria and Stakeholder Feedback. The process of internal reflection helps schools move forward in their ongoing improvement efforts.

Early learning schools have access to a variety of resources and support tools to assist the school in the accreditation process. Cognia Field Consultants are available to mentor and provide assistance to individual schools and systems.

Each early learning school is responsible for collecting and analyzing evidence, updating the school's demographics, and completing and submitting each of the following diagnostics in eProve:

- Assurances
- Self Assessment on Early Learning Standards, Indicators and Criteria
- Executive Summary
- Improvement Plan

Evidence: As part of the Self Assessment, evidence is defined for each of the Criteria. Evidences help school stakeholders to engage in a discussion about how the school knows it is adhering to the Standards, Indicators and Criteria.

External Review: Each early learning school hosts an External Review every five years as part of the school protocol or systems protocol. The External Review involves observations of the learning environments, provides focused feedback, and includes evaluation and validation of the school's improvement efforts. During the External Review, the Team reviews evidence relating to the school's adherence to the Cognia Accreditation Standards, Indicators and Criteria; progress in improvement efforts; and stakeholder feedback from staff and parents. If the school is part of a system, the External Review Team also gains knowledge about how the continuous improvement efforts of the system are implemented at the school level.

The External Review spans two days. The team will spend two days at a school pursuing School Accreditation. For schools that are part of a systems protocol, the team will remain at the school for a minimum of one day while spending the second day of the review gathering additional information about each school while onsite with the school system.

The External Review Team is comprised of multiple team members, typically three to five individuals. Each team member contributes to specific roles and responsibilities that address multiple purposes of the External Review. External Review Team members are required to be trained in the Cognia Accreditation Process through initial and update training sessions.

Accreditation Term: Per Cognia Policy, the final status of accreditation is granted by the Cognia Accreditation Commission. The accreditation term is for five years.

Summary of Standards and Indicators

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to a sense of community and relationships among young children and adults; developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development; as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, development, and care for young children.

INDICATOR 1.01

The school engages in a systematic, inclusive and comprehensive process to review, revise and communicate a school purpose for the care and developmentally appropriate learning, growth and development of young children.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support learning, growth and development in young children, family involvement and school effectiveness.

INDICATOR 2.01

The school's policies, practices and agreements ensure effective administration of the school.

INDICATOR 2.02

Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.

INDICATOR 2.03

Leadership engages defined stakeholder groups effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.

INDICATOR 2.04

Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and developmentally appropriate learning, growth and development of young children.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

The school's curriculum, instructional design and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and the developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative and physical growth and development of young children.

INDICATOR 3.01

The school's curriculum includes challenging content and provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure the developmentally appropriate cognitive, emotional, social, creative and physical growth and development of all young children and that lead to success at the next level.

INDICATOR 3.02

Curriculum, instruction and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data about young children's readiness, learning and development as well as examination of professional practice.

INDICATOR 3.03

Teachers engage young children in their learning through developmentally appropriate and effective instructional strategies that address achievement of learning expectations.

INDICATOR 3.04

School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure young children's success.

INDICATOR 3.05

Mentoring, coaching and induction programs model best practices and support instructional improvement consistent with the program's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

INDICATOR 3.06

The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.

INDICATOR 3.07

Documenting, measuring and reporting young children's learning, growth and development that represent the attainment of learning goals and content are consistent across the school's developmental programs.

INDICATOR 3.08

All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.

INDICATOR 3.09

The school provides and coordinates instruction to address the unique learning, growth and development needs of young children.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

The program has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all children.

INDICATOR 4.01

The school employs qualified Administrators/Directors for each administrative position to support the school's purpose, direction and educational program.

INDICATOR 4.02

The school employs qualified teachers for each administrative position to support the school's purpose, direction and educational program.

INDICATOR 4.03

The school maintains a class size and ratio of young children to teachers that support the care and developmentally appropriate learning, growth and development of young children.

INDICATOR 4.04

Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the early learning school.

INDICATOR 4.05

The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean and healthy environment for all young children and staff.

INDICATOR 4.06

The school regularly assesses and maintains all indoor spaces to be accessible to all young children and adults; are ventilated, lighted and temperature-controlled; and the spaces that primarily serve each age-group of young children have direct access to bathroom/washing facilities, sinks and drinking water.

INDICATOR 4.07

Each classroom learning space has sufficient, usable floor space and size to support the creativity and developmentally appropriate learning, growth, and development of young children, is highly functional for program delivery, and encourages positive staff-to-child relationships.

INDICATOR 4.08

Each classroom/learning space has furniture, equipment and resources that are safe, clean, well-maintained, adaptive, accessible and developmentally appropriate for the age group of young children they directly serve, sufficient in number and organized in ways to support appropriate and effective implementation of the program.

INDICATOR 4.09

Indoor and outdoor equipment are safe and available to all young children, are developmentally appropriate for the age-group, have appropriate surfaces to support a variety of types of learning and play, and have impact material under all climbing equipment and swings.

INDICATOR 4.10

Each classroom/learning space has multiple learning interest centers that are organized for independent use by young children, support the learning activities of the instructional program and the creativity of young children, and are well-equipped with materials supportive of the purpose of each learning/interest center.

INDICATOR 4.11

Each classroom/learning space provides all children with safe and comfortable, cozy areas to relax, rest or sleep that are continuously supervised by adults at all times.

INDICATOR 4.12

Each classroom/learning space has displays that are used effectively as a learning tool, are developmentally appropriate for the age-group, are attractively presented with appropriate content, portray the current learning activities and showcase children's work and creativity.

INDICATOR 4.13

The school provides support services to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of young children that are integral to the educational program.

INDICATOR 4.14

Each child receives individual personal care by staff members who consistently promote the child's general well-being, nutrition, health and safety.

INDICATOR 4.15

Arrival and departure routines focus on the care and well-being of each child and encourage a daily exchange of family and school communications regarding the care, well-being and educational progress of the child.

INDICATOR 4.16

The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment and educational referral needs of young children.

INDICATOR 4.17

All children, families and staff experience an environment of reciprocal respect, trust and open communication in a fair and just way, respecting the needs and characteristics of each individual and promoting a sense of community, belonging, ownership and pride.

INDICATOR 4.18

All indoor and outdoor spaces are free from hazards and dangerous circumstances for young children and adults, and adults actively remove and resolve hazardous conditions as they may occur.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The school uses data about the developmentally appropriate learning, growth and development of young children and overall school effectiveness to guide continuous improvement.

INDICATOR 5.01

Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from multiple data sources, including comprehensive and trend data about the readiness, growth, development and learning of young children as well as instruction, program evaluation and organizational conditions.



cognia.org