

# Index of Education Quality

For too many years, institutions have been judged based upon disparate and unrelated summative data points that fail to provide an accurate, holistic review of the quality of an institution. The scores have been used to identify schools to be targeted for punitive interventions as opposed to providing a formative assessment that can guide sustainable progress and improvement. In response to the need for institutions to have a deeper understanding of their institutional effectiveness, in the 2013–14 school year Cognia® introduced an innovative and state-of-the-art framework to measure institutional performance. The Index of Education Quality® provides an institution with a holistic measure of its overall performance measured against a comprehensive set of standards and evaluative criteria. As a formative tool for improvement, it graphically pinpoints areas of success as well as areas in need of support and/or focus.

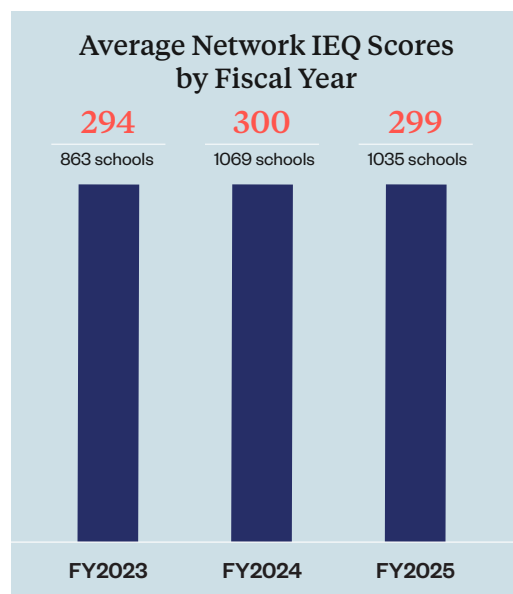
## The IEQ Score Explained

The IEQ® score is generated by combining ratings from the Cognia Performance Standards, along with individual standards and evaluative criteria relevant to the institution. All criteria are designed to ensure the institution can take meaningful actions to optimize outcomes for all learners.

Based on contextual evidence and the institution type, the score incorporates:

- Evaluative criteria from the student performance analysis
- Results from the stakeholder feedback diagnostic (surveys of learners, parents, and educators)
- Analysis of the learning environment from the learning environment observation diagnostic

The IEQ score and accompanying performance evidence are used to determine an institution's accreditation



status. This ensures that accreditation is not just a label, but a reflection of the institution's demonstrated performance and progress toward continuous improvement. The IEQ is not an average of averages. Rather, it is the aggregate of all individual standards and evaluative criteria that apply to the institution. The focus of all criteria is to ensure that the institution can take actions that will optimize outcomes for all learners.

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in a recommended accreditation status. Labels such as accredited, advised, warned, or on probation were used to describe the status of an institution relative to a set of static standards. These labels did not indicate formative measures by which a school or system could improve. In 2025, Cognia modernized accreditation to better reflect institutional performance and improvement. Institutions are now assigned one of four accreditation statuses—Accredited with Distinction, Accredited with Merit, Accredited, or Accredited Needing Improvement—based on their IEQ results and evidence of performance against Cognia Standards. These levels move beyond a binary accredited/non-accredited designation, offering a clearer picture of where institutions stand and where to focus improvement efforts.

For the institution to better leverage the information obtained from its IEQ score, additional data at the

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key characteristic level are provided as part of the accreditation report. The four key characteristics of high-quality education institutions are:

- Culture of Learning
- Leadership for Learning
- Engagement of Learning
- Growth in Learning

The key characteristic scores may be further analyzed through ratings and feedback on a combination of interrelated standards and evaluative criteria. The standards and evaluative criteria contain detailed performance levels that are a valuable source of guidance for setting goals and targets for improvement. By analyzing the ratings through the lens of the performance levels, institutions can identify their areas of strength as well as implement and monitor targeted improvement efforts aimed at addressing specific areas in need of improvement.

Given that the most critical aspect of an institution's work is optimizing teaching and learning, the IEQ framework recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. Each institution's IEQ is unique to that institution and reflects how it performs against Cognia Standards and Evaluative Criteria. Because the IEQ is

context-specific, it cannot be directly compared across institutions. Instead, the score is intended to guide that institution's own improvement journey, serving as an internal benchmark rather than a ranking tool. Schools accredited under the Cognia System Accreditation model do not receive an individual IEQ score. Instead, they are assigned the same score as the system as a whole. This reflects how the system functions as a single, integrated educational entity, and the IEQ is designed to capture overall effectiveness at the system level.

Through the engagement review process, institutions will continue to receive a comprehensive report of the evaluator's findings with recognition of noteworthy practices and areas for improvement. The index of education quality further enhances an institution's understanding of where it is situated on a continuum of performance against Cognia Performance Standards. The IEQ serves as a formative measure for placement on that continuum that solidifies the accreditation process as a lever for continuous improvement. Using the IEQ, institutions can focus their attention, activities, and actions to result in positive impacts and measurable improvements designed to unleash the potential of the institution's learners.