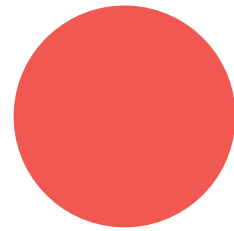


ACCREDITATION AND
CERTIFICATION



Policies and Procedures

cognia[®]

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Cognia Policies and Procedures for Accreditation and Certification

The Cognia policies and procedures outlined in this document represent the unified policies and procedures for accreditation and certification from Cognia and its Accreditation Divisions: North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), herein collectively referred to as Cognia. These policies are effective July 1, 2022, as approved by the Cognia Global Commission.

Definitions

For the purposes of these policies and procedures, the listed terms are defined as:

Accreditation. A voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools and designed primarily to distinguish institutions adhering to a set of educational standards and policies. Accreditation applies to an entire institution or system.

Certification. A voluntary process of quality assurance that yields a documented recognition of achievement of a defined process or program. Certification may apply to a process or program of an institution or to an institution as a whole.

Institution. Any educational unit such as a school, association, charter school authorizer, corporation, or education service agency (ESA) that is seeking accreditation or certification as a single entity.

System. Any organization such as a corporation, district, ESA, or system of institutions that is seeking accreditation for the system as a whole, including the organization's system-level and all of the institutions managed by the system.

Policy 1: Policy Management, Applicability and Recognition

- 1.1 Management.** The revision and adoption of the accreditation and certification policies and procedures of Cogna shall be the responsibility of the Cogna Global Commission.
- 1.2 Applicability.** These policies and procedures apply to all institutions or systems seeking Cogna accreditation and/or certification.
- 1.3 Recognition.** Institutions or systems that achieve accreditation and/or certification will be awarded the applicable accreditation and/or certification recognition representative of all three Cogna accreditation and certification divisions.

Policy 2: Term and Process Requirements of Accreditation and Certification

2.1 Eligibility for Accreditation and Certification.

- a.** Accreditation only. Accreditation may be conferred to an institution or a system. For systems accreditation, all schools managed by the system must be accredited or in the accreditation process, and the system-level is conferred accreditation in addition to the accreditation that is conferred to each institution.
- b.** Certification may be conferred to an institution or a system. Accreditation is a requirement for certification. For system certification, all schools managed by the system must be following the educational model of the certification, with system oversight and quality assurance processes to ensure the model is fully embedded in all schools. Certification is conferred under the name of the institution whether the certification was earned by the institution as a whole or by a program(s) within the institution.
- c.** Simultaneous Accreditation and Certification. An institution may be both accredited and certified. The expiration dates for any accreditation status or any certification status will be aligned to the accreditation term. An institution must earn certification concurrently with accreditation. An institution may lose certification without automatically jeopardizing the status of accreditation, but a loss of accreditation status will result in a loss of certification.

2.2 Term of Accreditation or Certification. The term of accreditation and/or certification is six years as long as the institution or system continues to satisfy the following:

- a.** General Requirements of [Policy 2.3](#).
- b.** Accreditation Requirements of [Policy 2.4](#) for institutions or systems seeking to achieve and maintain accreditation.
- c.** Certification Requirements of [Policy 2.5](#) for institutions seeking to achieve and maintain certification.
- d.** Additional Requirements of [Policy 2.6](#) for institutions and systems.

- 2.3 General Requirements.** In order to achieve and maintain Cognia accreditation or certification, an institution or system must:
- a. Maintain membership in Cognia.
 - b. Adhere to Cognia policies, Standards, and Assurances for accreditation and/or certification.
 - c. Submit all required reports and demographic updates within prescribed timeframes.
 - d. Pay all required fees within prescribed timeframes.

- 2.4 Accreditation Requirements.** In addition to the general requirements, and in order to achieve and maintain accreditation, an institution or system must:
- a. Notify Cognia of its intent to pursue accreditation by submitting an application for accreditation.
 - b. Meet the appropriate set of accreditation Standards and Assurances.
 - c. Authentically engage in continuous improvement to achieve results.
 - d. If not yet accredited at any status, the institution or system must host a Candidacy Review.
 - i. If Cognia determines the institution or system does not possess the capacity to meet the policies, Standards, and Assurances required to achieve accreditation, the institution or system will remain a member of Cognia and must host another Candidacy Review in order to pursue accreditation.
 - ii. If Cognia determines the institution or system has the capacity to meet policies, Standards, and Assurances required to achieve accreditation, the institution or system will be conferred with the status of Candidate.
 - e. Participate in required accreditation training within 12 months prior to the Engagement Review.
 - f. Host an Engagement Review within a timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office after achieving the status of Candidate and at least once every six years thereafter. An institution/system may request a delay of an Engagement Review for a timeframe not to exceed one year. The request must be submitted to Cognia in writing according to any specifications or guidelines provided by Cognia for requesting a delay.
 - i. Each Early Learning School within a system must host an individual Engagement Review for accreditation.
 - g. Submit required documentation to support the Engagement Review within timeframes as prescribed by Cognia.
 - h. Submit a progress report(s) within timeframes as prescribed by Cognia.

- 2.5 Certification Requirements.** In order to achieve and maintain certification, an institution must meet the following criteria in addition to the general requirements listed in Policy 2.4:
- a. Notify Cognia of its intent to pursue certification by submitting an application.
 - b. Meet the appropriate set of certification Standards.
 - c. Host a certification review concurrently with the accreditation Engagement Review or within a timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office and at least once every six years thereafter.

2.6 Additional Requirements. In addition to satisfying the conditions outlined in Policy 2.2, an institution or system must adhere to the following:

a. Compliance with Applicable Governmental Requirements. The institution or system must comply with all applicable governmental requirements, including any requirements for governmental approval, recognition, or accreditation. The system must ensure that all of its institutions also comply with all applicable governmental requirements, including any requirements for governmental approval, recognition, or accreditation. An institution's or system's loss of its governmental approval, recognition, accreditation, or certification may be grounds for an accreditation review, monitoring review, or certification review that may result in a change in accreditation or certification status in accordance with the procedures outlined in this document. In the absence of governmental regulations, or if governmental regulations are less than Cognia's, Cognia may choose to require the institution or system to meet the guidelines presented in the Cognia Educational Practices Reference Guide.

b. Non-discriminatory Admission of Students. Institutions and systems accredited or certified through Cognia shall not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national or ethnic origin, age, or disabilities or act unlawfully in the administration of their educational policies, scholarship, admission, and loan programs.

Institutions should have clear and transparent policies about their hiring and enrollment practices that are aligned with the institution's purpose, mission, and values. Cognia holds institutions accountable for following their stated policies through enacted procedures, local and national government regulations, as well as our standards and requirements for accreditation.

c. Records Retention. Institutions and systems are required to maintain and implement a records retention system that meets applicable government requirements for all operating, financial, personnel, and student records. If an institution or system is not subject to any governmental requirements, student records must be retained in perpetuity. The records retention system applies to paper and electronic records, includes appropriate back-up systems, and details consistent processes for records destruction.

i. Institutions and systems must have written procedures for the ongoing access and maintenance of all relevant records in the event the institution or system ceases operation.

ii. The institution or system must document to Cognia via the process for Substantive Change the location of where the records will be housed and contact information for that location.

d. Institutional Integrity and Due Process. An institution or system is required to represent itself accurately in all aspects of the accreditation process and/or certification process. If an institution or system misrepresents itself, including but not limited to the following: misrepresentation of its accreditation or certification status to the public; has any condition that may be detrimental to the students and/or clientele of the institution or system; or falsely reports its compliance with the policies and Standards for accreditation and/or certification; the institution's or system's accreditation and/or certification may be dropped. If an institution's or system's accreditation and/or certification is recommended to be dropped, the institution or system shall be afforded due process in consideration of such action.

- e. Substantive Change.** An institution and system must report to Cognia within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the institution and system, which changes the scope and/or has an impact on the institution's or system's ability to meet the Cognia Standards and policies. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact of the change on the quality of education in the institution or system. Substantive change areas include, but are not limited to, the following:
- i.** Cease of operation/closure of the institution or system. Include the location of where student records will be housed and the contact information for that location.
 - ii.** Official name of institution.
 - iii.** Physical location of the institution or system.
 - iv.** Consolidation or reorganization of the institution.
 - v.** Mission and purpose of the institution.
 - vi.** Governance structure of the institution or system, including changing to a charter school or charter school system, being the subject of a governmental takeover, or a change in ownership.
 - vii.** Grade levels served by the institution or system.
 - viii.** Student enrollment change greater than 20% increase or decrease.
 - ix.** Head of institution and other staff in leadership positions.
 - x.** Level of funding change greater than 20% increase or decrease.
 - xi.** School day or school year.
 - xii.** Establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus.
- Institution or system failure to submit a substantive change may result in changes to the institution's or system's accreditation and/or certification status or loss of accreditation and/or certification.
- f. Credits or Grade Placement.** The institution must maintain written policy and procedures for credits and grade placement and should be designed to ensure proper academic placement of the student.
- i.** The institution shall accept and classify transfer credits earned or grade placement from institutions that are accredited by a recognized national, regional,¹ or state accrediting agency without further validation based on the school's policies and procedures governing such offerings.
 - ii.** The institution may accept credits or grade placement from non-accredited institutions when validated by one or more of the following procedures: a review of the student's academic record, an analysis of a sending institution's curriculum, a review of a portfolio of student work, or through an assessment of scholastic performance. The receiving institution must maintain policies and procedures to govern the acceptance of credit or grade placement from non-accredited sources.

¹ Recognized regional accrediting agencies include the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA CESS), and New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

- iii. The institution should provide prompt and accurate transcript services for students entering or leaving the institution in accordance with local policy.

2.7 Cognia Responsibilities. Cognia is responsible for supporting and monitoring institution and system adherence to the Cognia Standards and policies, conducting an Engagement Review to every accredited school or system at least once every six years; conducting a Certification Review to every institution holding a certification at least once every six years; reviewing all institution and system reports; granting an accreditation or certification status for all institutions or systems; responding to complaints by and about institutions and systems; and maintaining accurate, complete, and timely records.

a. Codes of Conduct. In performing the responsibilities outlined in Policy 2.7, all agents of Cognia shall adhere to the Cognia Code of Ethics, Cognia Conflict of Interest Policy, and Cognia Confidentiality Statement, including Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Compliance and/or other governmental privacy regulations as applicable.

i. Code of Ethics. Cognia Representatives agree to adhere to the Cognia Code of Ethics. The code outlines the ethical behaviors that are essential to the proper performance of Cognia duties and to the maintenance of confidence in our work by our institutions and systems, other clients, and the public.

1. **Conflicts of Interest.** We conduct ourselves in a manner which seeks to avoid a conflict of interest or any appearance of a conflict of interest. We abide by the Cognia Conflict of Interest Policy.
2. **Impartiality.** We treat all institutions and systems that are or may seek membership, accreditation, or certification services with impartiality and courtesy.
3. **Confidentiality and Privacy.** We treat information obtained through institutions' or systems' participation in the accreditation and/or certification process as confidential and shall not disclose such information except in a manner that is consistent with Cognia policies, governmental regulation, or judicial procedure. We respect the privacy rights of all individuals in the performance of Cognia duties.
4. **Transparency.** We are committed to providing timely, complete, and accurate information to the public and appropriate stakeholders. All information about the organization will fully and honestly reflect the policies and practices of Cognia.
5. **Legal Compliance.** We are knowledgeable of and comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and requirements.
6. **Responsible Stewardship.** We manage the organization and its resources responsibly and prudently. We use organizational resources only for Cognia purposes.
7. **Inclusiveness and Diversity.** We promote inclusiveness and seek diversity in officers, staff, board members, agents, contractors, and volunteers and the institutions, systems, and other clients we serve in order to enrich our effectiveness.

ii. **Conflict of Interest Policy.**

The Cognia Conflict of Interest Policy is designed to ensure the highest level of ethical conduct of employees, volunteers, and agents of Cognia (hereinafter referred to as “Cognia Representatives” or “Representatives”) and to avoid public perceptions and financial consequences detrimental to Cognia that could arise from the misuse, or perception of misuse, of an individual’s position or influence.

1. **Conduct.** Cognia adheres to the highest legal and ethical standards applicable in our business. Cognia’s business is conducted in the strict observance of both the letter and spirit of all applicable laws and regulations, including the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the integrity of each Cognia Representative is of utmost importance. Business dealings that appear to create conflicts of interest between Cognia and a Cognia Representative are unacceptable. A potential or actual conflict of interest occurs whenever a Cognia Representative is in a position to influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for the Cognia Representative or an immediate family member as a result of Cognia’s business dealings. Cognia Representatives shall conduct themselves in a manner which seeks to avoid a conflict of interest or any appearance of a conflict of interest between their personal interests and interests of Cognia.
2. **Full Disclosure.** Cognia Representatives shall disclose to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer any possible conflict of interest, at the earliest possible time, in a written disclosure statement. The Chief Global Accreditation Officer is responsible for reviewing all submitted statements and making decisions concerning resolutions of conflicts.
3. **Conflicts of Interest.** A Cognia Representative shall be considered to have a possible conflict of interest if such individual has an existing or potential financial or other interest which impairs or might appear to impair independent, unbiased judgment in discharging responsibilities on behalf of Cognia.
 - a. Such interests may include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Any financial or other interests in institutions and systems that are Cognia members or seeking Cognia membership, accredited, seeking accreditation, and/or certified or seeking certification services through Cognia;
 - ii. Employment or consulting arrangements with institutions or systems engaged in the accreditation or certification without prior disclosure to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer;
 - iii. Ownership of some or all of an institution or system;
 - iv. The holding of mortgages, liens, or other debt instruments or interest upon an institution or system engaged in the accreditation and/or certification;
 - v. Service as an officer or director of an institution or system that is engaged in the accreditation and/or certification; or
 - vi. The possession of any of the listed interests by a spouse, child, other relative or close friend.

- b. While institutions and systems are specifically noted in the above examples (i-vi), conflict of interest may be with any clients, vendors, or matters of Cognia operations where a Cognia Representative is in a position to benefit, directly or indirectly, from his/her dealings with Cognia.
 - c. If a Cognia Representative is uncertain about whether a particular interest should be declared, the individual shall describe the interest in writing to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer who will issue a binding ruling as to whether the matter in question constitutes a reportable conflict of interest.
4. **Prohibited Actions.** In circumstances in which a Cognia Representative has a possible conflict of interest, the Representative shall not:
 - a. Participate in financial or other agreements with any institutions or systems, clients, or vendors where a possible conflict of interest might exist;
 - b. Participate in any type of Cognia Review of the institutions or systems wherein the conflict of interest may exist or in discussions regarding issues that may involve a possible conflict of interest.
 5. **Signing of the Conflict of Interest Statement.** All Cognia Representatives shall be advised of the Conflict of Interest Policy and shall sign the statement using procedures as provided by Cognia.
 6. **Violations of the Conflicts of Interest Policy.** If the Chief Global Accreditation Officer has reasonable cause to believe a Cognia Representative has failed to disclose actual or possible conflicts of interest, he/she shall inform the Representative of the basis for belief and afford the Representative an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclose.
 - a. If, after hearing the Representative's response and after making further investigation as warranted by the circumstances, the Chief Global Accreditation Officer determines that the Representative has failed to disclose an actual or possible conflict of interest, the Chief Global Accreditation Officer shall take appropriate disciplinary and/or corrective action.

iii. Confidentiality Statement. As part of the accreditation and/or certification process, or other Cognia member services, institutions and systems submit to Cognia information considered to be of a proprietary and confidential nature. Other than granting a limited license to use said information for the purposes of providing accreditation, certification, and/or other Cognia member service to the institution or system, Cognia recognizes that the submission of information does not transfer ownership of said property to Cognia.

1. Cognia retains all rights, title, and interest in the work product produced, including but not limited to supporting notes, analyses, interpretations, and impressions compiled by agents of Cognia as part of the accreditation and/or certification process and other Cognia member services.

2. Any and all information provided to or collected by Cognia as part of the processes for accreditation, certification, and/or Cognia membership shall be safeguarded in a manner comparable to a standard of reasonable care exercised by other agencies engaged in accreditation and school improvement activities. Cognia will maintain the documentation and evidence submitted by the institution or system in a password controlled, access restricted environment.
 3. If Cognia is required by legal, judicial, or administrative process to disclose information beyond the institution's or system's Executive Summary, Engagement Review Report, Certification Review Report, Progress Assessment Report, and any special or interim accreditation or certification reports, Cognia shall promptly notify the institution or system and allow the institution or system a time to oppose such process.
 - a. Nothing contained herein shall obligate Cognia to oppose such process, and all cost incurred in opposing said process shall be the responsibility of the school/school system/education provider seeking protection.
 4. Information shall not be deemed confidential or proprietary for purposes of this policy, if said information:
 - a. Is already known to Cognia at the time of disclosure;
 - b. Is or becomes publicly known through no wrongful act of Cognia or its agents; or
 - c. Is disclosed by the actions of a non-restricted third party.
 5. Nothing contained herein shall interfere with the legal obligation of Cognia to report instances of child abuse, sexual harassment, or discrimination or any other affirmative reporting requirements under any applicable laws and/or governmental regulations.
- b. Gifts.** Members of Engagement Review Teams, Certification Review Teams, other review teams as conducted by Cognia, and other agents of Cognia who provide services to institutions and systems are prohibited from accepting gifts, other than branded logo items of minimal value, from institutions and systems.
- c. Violation Review and Due Process.** In performing its duties, Cognia may review and/or evaluate an accredited or certified institution or system on any matter related to possible violations of Cognia Standards and Policies at any time. Cognia shall use its judgment and discretion in determining whether a complaint rises to a level justifying an evaluation. Evaluations will only be initiated when supported by substantial evidence and when they involve matters that could seriously hinder or disrupt the educational effectiveness of the institution and ability of the institution to meet the Cognia Policies or Standards for accreditation or certification.

All violation evaluations shall be conducted with proper attention to due process, and procedures shall be followed to protect the rights of all parties. The accreditation status of an accredited institution or system or the certification status of a certified institution or system may be changed as deemed appropriate through the review and evaluation process; and timelines set forth in [Policy 3](#) may not necessarily apply to special reviews and subsequent monitoring reviews. When warranted by a change of status recommendation, the results of an evaluation shall be reported to the Cognia Global Commission.

- d. Maintenance of and Public Access to Institution and System Records.** Cognia maintains a record retention system that includes procedures for maintenance and access to institution and system records. Cognia retains all institution and system final accreditation and certification reports and official correspondence for a 10-year period, documenting two full terms of accreditation or certification. Cognia makes available for public access the institution's and system's accreditation and certification status, institution's and system's term of accreditation and certification, and institution's and system's date of initial accreditation and certification. Cognia reserves the right to make available for public access the institution's or system's Engagement Review Report, Certification Review Report, and any progress, special, or interim accreditation reports.

Policy 3: Statuses for Accreditation and Certification

3.1 Status. Accreditation or certification status is based on the performance of an institution or system in areas related to policies, Standards, and Assurances. No provisions in [Policy 3](#) prevent an institution's or system's accreditation status from being changed upon a different timeline established due to the findings of a special review and/or possible subsequent monitoring reviews.

- a. Accreditation Status.** Accreditation status is a designation provided by Cognia that defines the institution's or system's standing relative to the results of an Engagement Review and/or due to the findings of a progress report(s), special review, and/or subsequent monitoring reviews.

There are three accreditation statuses that may be conferred on an institution or system. The accreditation status is based on the performance of an institution or system in areas related to the applicable set of accreditation Standards, policies, Assurances, student performance results, and stakeholder feedback.

- i. Accredited.** A status conferred to an institution or system in good standing, and based on the most recent Engagement Review, meets all or a substantial number of Standards and criteria and has documented performance results and an Index of Education Quality® (IEQ®) score at acceptable levels.

The institution or system having a status of Accredited will continue with that status through the assigned expiration date of the six-year accreditation term as long as the institution or system continuously meets the policies, Standards, and Assurances for accreditation.

- ii. Accredited Under Review.** A status conferred to an institution or system in fair standing; and based on the most recent Engagement Review, fails to meet a substantial number of Standards or criteria, and has an IEQ score that falls below an acceptable range as determined by Cognia and/or documented levels of poor/unsatisfactory performance results. Additionally, an institution or system may be conferred the status of Accredited Under Review based on the results of a special review or monitoring review wherein the institution or system fails to meet a substantial number of Standards or criteria, or is in noncompliance with policies and Assurances impacting the effective operations of the institution or system.

An institution or system having a status of Accredited Under Review will submit an annual progress report(s) to Cognia on Areas for Improvement identified in the

most recent review report, host an onsite monitoring review within one year of the previous review, and host subsequent monitoring reviews as prescribed by Cognia.

An institution or system having a status of Accredited Under Review will continue with that status until the institution or system successfully documents adequate progress in Areas for Improvement and/or by providing documented evidence of substantially meeting policies, Standards, and Assurances for accreditation.

iii. Accredited Under Conditions. A status is conferred to an institution or system in poor standing with the following conditions:

1. Has held the status of Accredited Under Review for at least twelve (12) months and,
2. Has failed to demonstrate, with documented evidence, substantive progress in addressing the circumstances for which the institution was conferred the status of Accredited Under Review.

OR

3. Has been found by a special review to no longer adhere to the accreditation Standards, policies, and Assurances (refer to [Policy 6.5](#)); fails to cooperate with any special review or request for information; and circumstances warrant such action.

Only an institution or system having a status of Accredited Under Conditions may be recommended for drop of accreditation.

- a. **Intent to File Response.** Within thirty (30) calendar days of the Cognia Global Commission's ratification of the institution's or system's status of Accredited Under Conditions, the institution or system must notify Cognia in writing of its intent to file a written response that the institution or system should not have its accreditation dropped.
- b. **Response.** Within sixty (60) calendar days of submitting the intent to file a written response, the institution or system must submit to Cognia a written response that the institution or system should not have its accreditation dropped. The response must be substantiated by documented evidence(s) that address the circumstances for the institution having been conferred the status of Accredited Under Conditions. Additionally, a documented improvement plan, inclusive of strategies, timelines and dedicated resources targeted toward the identified circumstances must accompany the response.
- c. **Cognia Decision.** Within thirty (30) calendar days of Cognia receiving the institution's or system's written response with substantiating evidence and improvement plan, Cognia will notify the institution or system of Cognia's decision to either:
 - i. Continue the institution's or system's status of Accredited Under Conditions not to exceed one year from the date of Commission ratification. Cognia may extend the institution's or system's status of Accredited Under Conditions for one year at a time until the institution or system has successfully documented sufficient progress to warrant a change in status to Accredited Under Review.

OR

- ii. Proceed with procedures to drop the accreditation of the institution or system according to Policy 3.2b.

b. Certification Status. Certification status is a designation provided by Cognia that defines the standing of an institution or a system relative to the results of a certification review, a special review, and/or subsequent monitoring reviews.

- i. There is one certification status that may be conferred on an institution or a system. The certification status is based on the performance of an institution or a system in areas related to the applicable set of certification Standards, policies, and Assurances. In order to maintain certification in good standing, the institution or system must also be accredited.
- ii. **Certified.** A status conferred to an institution or system in good standing, and based on the most recent Certification Review, meets the criteria established by Cognia.
- iii. The institution or system having a status of Certified will continue with that status through the assigned expiration date of the six-year accreditation term as long as the institution or system continuously meets the policies, Standards, and Assurances for accreditation and certification.

3.2 Non-accredited or Non-certified Status. There are two non-accredited statuses that may be conferred on an institution or system, which are candidate for accreditation and dropped from accreditation, and one non-certified status that may be conferred on an institution which is dropped from certification. Any Cognia member institution or system that has not yet achieved any accreditation and/or certification status remains as a Cognia member.

a. Candidate for Accreditation. The Cognia member institution or system becomes a candidate once it has hosted a Candidacy Review and the Candidacy Review Team and Cognia Accreditation Office find that the institution or system has the capacity to meet the Standards, policies and Assurances required to earn accreditation, but the institution or system has not yet completed the Engagement Review. The institution or system must complete the Engagement Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office.

- i. The institution or system may remain as a Cognia member if it has hosted the Candidacy Review and been found by the Candidacy Review Team and the Cognia Accreditation Office to not have the capacity to meet the Standards, policies, or Assurances to earn accreditation. In such a case, the institution or system will not be conferred the status of candidate.
- ii. The institution or system must host another Candidacy Review if again pursuing accreditation.

b. Dropped.

- i. **Accreditation.** The institution or system will receive a dropped status if it:
 - 1. Does not meet the Standards, policies and/or Assurances of the accreditation process or certification process; or
 - 2. Finds it is no longer able to meet the Cognia accreditation and/or certification Standards, policies and/or Assurances and notifies the Cognia Accreditation Office that it wishes to have its accredited status or certification status dropped; or

3. Has been Accredited Under Conditions and fails to make substantial progress within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office on the circumstances for the institution having been conferred the status of Accredited Under Review; or
4. Fails to pay membership and other fees related to accreditation and/or certification within prescribed timelines.
5. The dropped status is effective on July 1 of the current academic year when membership fees for the current academic year have not been received by the annual subscription date.
 - a. An institution or system that has been dropped from accreditation must remove all references to its accredited status from institution and/or system diplomas, certificates, websites, buildings, literature, and any other public facing documents or media.
 - b. A dropped institution or system may seek reinstatement for accreditation within one year of receiving the Cognia notification letter of the dropped status. After one year, the dropped institution or system must reapply and follow the same procedures as new institutions or systems.

ii. Certification. The institution or system will receive a dropped status for certification if it:

1. Does not meet the Standards and/or policies of the certification process; or
2. Finds it is no longer able to meet the Cognia certification Standards and/or policies and notifies the Cognia Accreditation Office that it wishes to have its certification status dropped; or
3. Is no longer accredited by Cognia.
4. An institution or system that has been dropped from certification must remove all references to its certification status from institution and/or system diplomas, certificates, websites, buildings, literature, and any other public facing documents or media.

c. Future or Expected Status. An institution or system that does not hold a current status of accreditation and/or certification may not project future or expected accreditation or certification status. All candidate institutions or systems are not accredited or certified until such status is officially granted by the Cognia Global Commission. In any public announcements regarding the institution's or system's pursuit of accreditation or certification, the institution or system must avoid any implication that the Cognia membership or candidate status equates with accreditation or certification or automatically leads to accreditation or certification. Cognia's Global Commission shall have full authority and discretion to deny accreditation or certification status to any institution or system determined by Cognia to be in violation of this policy.

d. Ongoing Monitoring. The status of an institution or system is regularly monitored by Cognia's Accreditation Offices and may be changed by the Cognia Global Commission based on new or corrected information provided by the institution or system, Engagement Review Reports, Certification Review Reports, reports from special reviews, complaints submitted, or other sources.

- 3.3 Reinstatement.** Institutions or systems may request reinstatement of their accreditation status in accordance with the following conditions and steps for reinstatement:
- a.** Within twelve (12) months of the institution's or system's receipt of the Cognia notification letter of the dropped accreditation status by the Cognia Global Commission, Cognia receives the institution's or system's request for reinstatement of accreditation status. The institution may request/access the Cognia Request for Reinstatement form from the Cognia Accreditation Office.
 - b.** The institution or system completes and submits the Request for Reinstatement form.
 - c.** The institution or system submits the reinstatement fee and Cognia membership fees for all years covered by the reinstatement timeframe. The fees are submitted to the Cognia Finance Department using the instructions provided on the Reinstatement for Reinstatement form.
 - d.** Within fifteen calendar (15) days of receiving the Request for Reinstatement form, all applicable Cognia membership fees, and the reinstatement fee, the Cognia Accreditation Office contacts the institution or system to confirm receipt of the reinstatement request form and fees.
 - e.** Upon the institution or system being reinstated to the status of accredited, the institution or system is reinstated to the original accreditation term. The institution or system must satisfy all requirements of the accreditation and/or certification term in which it is being reinstated.
 - f.** For institutions or systems that have been dropped for cause, the following procedures are required:
 - i.** Within thirty (30) calendar days, the institution or system must submit to the Cognia Accreditation Office a written rationale for the institution or system to be reinstated to its accreditation status at the time of being dropped. The rationale must be substantiated by documented evidence(s) that address progress toward the circumstances for the institution having been conferred the status of Accredited Under Conditions. Additionally, a documented improvement plan, inclusive of strategies, timelines, and dedicated resources targeted toward the identified circumstances must accompany the rationale.
 - ii.** Within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving the written rationale with substantiating documentation and improvement plan from the institution or system, the Cognia Accreditation Office forwards the Request for Reinstatement form, the rationale for reinstatement with its substantiating evidence and improvement plan, accreditation actions or recommendations for review, and action to the Cognia Global Commission at the next scheduled Cognia Global Commission meeting.
 - iii.** Upon Cognia Global Commission action to reinstate the institution's or system's accreditation status, the institution or system is reinstated with an expiration date not to exceed one year from the date of Commission action. Cognia may extend the institution's or system's status of Accreditation Under Conditions for one year at a time until the institution or system has successfully documented sufficient progress to warrant a change in status to Accredited Under Review or higher.
 - g.** An institution or system that dropped in its sixth year of the accreditation term and reinstates must host an Engagement Review for accreditation upon reinstatement.

Policy 4: Procedures for Initial Accreditation and Certification

4.1 Overview. Institutions or systems seeking initial accreditation must demonstrate that they meet the Cognia Standards, policies, and Assurances for accreditation, have the capacity to support institution or system improvement and are committed to growth in student learning and organizational effectiveness. Institutions or systems seeking initial certification must be accredited and must demonstrate that they meet the Cognia Standards and policies for certification.

4.2 General Guidelines. Following are general guidelines for all institutions or systems seeking initial accreditation: An institution or system must:

- a. Demonstrate financial stability before it may be accredited.
- b. Certify that it possesses the appropriate licenses to operate if licensing is required by any governmental authority applicable to the institution or system.
- c. For accreditation, host a Candidacy Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office.
- d. For accreditation, complete an Engagement Review after becoming a candidate for accreditation within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office.
- e. For certification, an institution must be accredited and complete a Certification Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office.

4.3 Application for Accreditation and/or Certification and Fees. The institution or system must complete and submit all required application materials. All accreditation and review fees for certification are specified in a Cognia fee schedule.

4.4 For Accreditation – Candidacy Review and Candidacy Status. Upon receipt of completed application materials and fees, Cognia coordinates a Candidacy Review with the institution or system seeking accreditation. The purpose of the review is to:

- a. Determine if the institution or system has the capacity and integrity to meet and adhere to the Cognia Standards, policies, and Assurances.
- b. Determine if the institution or system has the capacity to support continuous improvement.
- c. Make a determination if the institution or system should become a candidate for accreditation or remain as a Cognia member.

Upon achievement of candidate status, the institution or system authentically engages in the accreditation process and continuous improvement, submits any required documents, and prepares for its first Engagement Review. In the case of systems, all institutions within the system also authentically engage in the accreditation process and continuous improvement, submit required documents, and participate in the preparations for the system Engagement Review, including participating in school reviews, as may be required.

4.5 For Accreditation – Engagement Review and Accreditation Recommendation. The candidate institution or system completes an Engagement Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office. The Engagement Review results in an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed, along with other documentation, by Cognia and the Cognia Global Commission which takes accreditation action.

4.6 For Accreditation – Remaining in Candidacy Status. If accreditation is not conferred on the institution or system after completing its initial Engagement Review, the institution or system remains as a candidate for accreditation. To achieve accreditation, the institution or system must:

- a. Meet the requirements specified in the Engagement Review Report.
- b. Complete a follow-up Engagement Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office to address, at a minimum, the requirements specified in the Engagement Review Report.
- c. Provide documentation for the subsequent Engagement Review that addresses the requirements specified in the Engagement Review Report.

The Engagement Review results in an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed, along with the submitted documentation, by Cognia and the Cognia Global Commission which takes accreditation action.

If the institution or system fails to meet the requirements specified in the Engagement Review Report, its candidate status may be removed. The institution or system may remain a Cognia member and must inform Cognia if it wishes to continue to seek accreditation.

4.7 For Certification – Certification Review and Certification Recommendation. The Cognia member institution or system must complete a Certification Review within the timeframe established by the Cognia Accreditation Office. The Certification Review results in a certification recommendation that is reviewed, along with other documentation, by Cognia and Cognia Global Commission which takes certification action.

- a. If certification is not conferred, the institution or system may remain a Cognia member and must inform Cognia if it wishes to continue to seek certification.

4.8 For Accreditation – Institutions from a System that is System Accredited. Institutions applying for initial accreditation that are part of systems that are system accredited use the following procedures:

- a. The institution (school) completes and submits an application for accreditation.
- b. The system verifies that the institution meets Cognia Accreditation Standards, policies, and Assurances and is actively engaged in the system’s process for quality Assurance.
- c. Upon receiving the system’s notification of an additional institution(s), the appropriate Cognia Office makes an accreditation recommendation that is submitted to the Cognia Global Commission for accreditation action
- d. Upon earning accredited status, the institution engages in the system’s approved plan for accreditation.
- e. If the institution is not recommended for accreditation, the system must submit a plan for how it will address any noted deficiencies to ensure the institution is ready for accreditation within a year.
- f. Early learning schools within a system must each complete an individual Engagement Review for accreditation. The Engagement Review results in an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed, along with the submitted documentation, by Cognia and the Cognia Global Commission which takes accreditation action.

4.9 Continuing Accreditation or Certification. Upon achieving an accreditation status or certification status, the institution or system engages in continuous improvement and meets and adheres to the Cognia Standards, policies, and Assurances required of all institutions or systems to maintain their accreditation or certification status.

Policy 5: Procedures for Consolidated, Reorganized, and Other Schools

5.1 Consolidated Institutions. A consolidated school may retain continuing accreditation provided that at least one of the institutions involved in the consolidation is accredited by Cognia at the time of the consolidation. There must be no break in accreditation. The institution must submit written notification of consolidation to the Cognia Accreditation Office. The Cognia Accreditation Office will review the notification of consolidation and update the records accordingly.

5.2 Reorganized Institutions. A new institution(s) formed by reorganization of an accredited school may retain continuing accreditation with the approval of the Cognia Accreditation Office. The reorganized institution must submit written notification of its reorganization to the Cognia Accreditation Office. The Cognia Accreditation Office will review the notification and determine whether the reorganized school may continue its accreditation or be required to apply as a new institution and follow the new institution procedures.

5.3 Extension or Branch Campuses. An extension or branch campus of an institution can be accredited as part of the main campus provided all of the following conditions are met:

- a.** The extension or branch campus is under the direct supervision of the administrative head of the main campus institution.
- b.** The director or supervisor of the extension or branch campus reports directly to the administrative head of the main campus institution.
- c.** The extension or branch campus only serves students who are enrolled in the main campus institution.
- d.** The extension or branch campus provides a program of services that are a part of the total educational program of the main campus, and it does not duplicate services or programs.
- e.** The extension or branch campus operates under the same identification number (or identifier) as the main campus as provided by the regulating governmental authority. If this requirement is met, but is in opposition to any of the other provisions in [Policy 5.3](#), the extension or branch campus may be accredited as part of the main campus institution.

5.4 Schools within a School. Schools within a school are treated as separate schools and are required to comply with all Cognia accreditation requirements if the governmental authority has provided them with distinct school numbers. If the schools share the same state-provided school number, they may be treated as one school by Cognia.

Policy 6: Procedures Regarding Complaints by and about Accredited and/or Certified Institutions or Systems

6.1 Written complaint. Any complaints submitted by and about institutions or systems must be submitted in writing, both paper and electronic notices are acceptable. All complaints should include the following information to allow for proper review and if determined, in the sole discretion of Cognia, further appropriate evaluation:

- a.** The name, address, phone number and other pertinent contact information of the complainant.
- b.** A description of the circumstances or events and any relevant documentation that support the complaint.
- c.** A statement of relationship with the individual involved, if the complainant is not the aggrieved individual. Complaints concerning individual students will only be reviewed or sent to the institution if the complaint is made or authorized by a student of majority age or by an individual that has the legal authority and right to represent the student.
- d.** The name, address, and other contact information for the individual at the school/school system that has been contacted by the complainant to resolve the problem or situation.
- e.** Permission for representatives of Cognia to access pertinent records concerning the complainant if such records are not available to the public.
- f.** A statement of first-hand knowledge of the substance of the complaint, unless the complaint is supported by reliable documentation which is referenced in the complaint.

6.2 Complaints Regarding Conflicts of Interest. Any complaint that identifies a potential conflict of interest shall be filed with the Chief Global Accreditation Officer of Cognia. Any complaints submitted regarding potential conflicts of interest must be submitted in writing, both paper or electronic notices are acceptable. All complaints should include the following information to allow for proper review and if determined, in the sole discretion of Cognia, further appropriate evaluation:

- a.** The name, address, phone number, and other pertinent contact information of the complainant.
- b.** A description of the circumstances or events and any relevant documentation that support the complaint.
- c.** A statement of relationship with the individual involved, if the complainant is not the aggrieved individual.

6.3 Complaints Regarding Child Abuse, Sexual Harassment or Discrimination. Any complaint that identifies potential child abuse, sexual harassment or discrimination on the part of a student or staff member, shall be forwarded immediately to the appropriate agency authorized to manage such complaints. Unsigned complaints concerning potential child abuse, sexual harassment, or discrimination will be forwarded to the principal and the superintendent or other similar official in the institution's or system's organization. Findings by the appropriate agency may result in action by Cognia's Global Commission.

6.4 Individual Grievances. Isolated and individual grievances between an institution or system and person are not evaluated by Cognia. Cognia will acknowledge to the person filing the complaint, in writing, the receipt of the complaint.

- a.** Cognia Accreditation Office will contact the complainant to review the requirements of Policy 6.1 if the complaint received by Cognia does not meet such requirements and to inform the complainant that the complaint with redacted information to protect the identity of the complainant will be shared with the institution or system according to Policy 6.4(b). This contact may be made by Cognia through written, email and/or telephone conversation. This contact affords the complainant the opportunity to append additional information as necessary and proceed with the complaint to Cognia or to withdraw a submitted complaint. Under no circumstances will Cognia encourage the complainant to withdraw a complaint. Rather, this is to transparently communicate Cognia procedures to the complainant.
- b.** Cognia will notify the institution or system of each complaint that is of an individual grievance. Upon request, Cognia will provide copies of complaints to the institution with redacted information to protect the identity of the complainants. The institution will bear the responsibility to respond to requests for copies of the complaints from stakeholders or other interested parties.
- c.** The Cognia notification to the institution or system may request the institution or system to:
 - i.** Within 30 days, respond in writing to Cognia communicating its handling of the complaint, or
 - ii.** Address the complaint according to the institution's own policy and procedure for managing complaints but that no written response is required to Cognia.
 - iii.** A copy of the complaint and the institution's or system's response to the complaint, if required, will be maintained by the appropriate Cognia Accreditation Office.
- d.** If several individual complaints against a school suggest a particular violation or pattern of violations which might affect the institution's or system's ability to meet Cognia Standards, policies or Assurances, further evaluation may be authorized and shall occur within a reasonable period of time.

6.5 Review and Evaluation of Complaints. Cognia will pursue complaints that are determined by Cognia to sufficiently identify potential violations of Cognia Standards, policies, or Assurances. Cognia will notify the institution or system in writing of each complaint. Cognia will provide copies of complaints to the institution with redacted information to protect the identity of the complainants. The institution will bear the responsibility to respond to requests for copies of the complaints from stakeholders or other interested parties. Cognia will request the institution or system to respond in writing within 30 days to Cognia communicating the institution's handling of the complaint.

- a.** If Cognia determines that an institution's or system's response to a complaint does not sufficiently address the complaint or if an institution or system fails to address the complaint in a timely manner, the information about the complaint will be shared with
 - i.** The Engagement Review Team scheduled for the next review of the institution or system if an Engagement Review is scheduled during the current year, or

7.3 Grounds for Appeal. The grounds on which an appeal may be taken are:

- a.** Departure by the Cognia Global Commission from the procedures established by written policy, or agreement, or by recognized custom which is of such significance as to affect materially the adverse decision;
- b.** The citing by the Cognia Global Commission of factually incorrect information as basis for its decision which is of such significance as to affect materially the Commission's adverse action;
- c.** Bias, as evidenced by a demonstrable intent on the part of evaluators, the Cognia Global Commission, or the Cognia Global Commission's professional staff to prejudice the evaluation or other review of the institution's status of accreditation, such bias being of such significance as to affect materially the Cognia Global Commission's adverse accrediting action; or
- d.** The adverse action is arbitrary and capricious.

7.4 Appeal Procedures. An institution or system wishing to appeal shall do so in accordance with the procedures set forth as follows:

- a.** Within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the written notice of the decision for adverse action, the institution or system shall file its intent to appeal the decision to place the institution or system on any of the listed statuses:
 - i.** Accredited Under Conditions
 - ii.** Drop of Accreditation
 - iii.** Drop of Certification

See [Policy 7.3](#) for grounds for an appeal.

- b.** A notice of an intent to appeal shall be filed only with the prior authorization of the governing authority of the institution or system and documentation or evidence of such authorization shall be included in the notice of intent to appeal.
- c.** The notice of intent to appeal shall be submitted via overnight service or Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer of Cognia.
- d.** The notice of intent to appeal shall contain a statement of the ground(s) on which the appeal will be made but need not provide evidence in support of the appeal.
 - i.** The institution or system shall submit to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer of Cognia a bond for costs of the appeal in the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000.00) that accompanies the notice of intent to appeal.
 - ii.** After the costs of the appeal have been deducted from the amount of the bond, any unused portion of the bond shall be returned to the institution or system.
 - iii.** If the costs of the appeal exceed the amount of the bond, the institution or system shall pay the additional costs to Cognia.
- e.** Within twenty (20) calendar days of filing notice of intent to appeal, the institution's or system's written appeal shall be submitted in person or by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the Cognia Chief Global Accreditation Officer.
 - i.** The institution's or system's written appeal shall set forth its argument and supporting evidence as the basis for its appeal. Only evidence previously submitted to Cognia may be included in the submission. New evidence will not be considered.

- ii.** At the time of filing the written appeal, the institution or system shall advise the Chief Global Accreditation Officer it will present oral arguments at the appeals hearing and, if so, with or without legal counsel. In the event the school/school system elects not to send representatives to the appeals hearing, then Cognia shall likewise not send representatives to the hearing, and the Appeals Panel will be authorized to decide the appeal based solely on the written submissions of the parties.
- iii.** If the institution or system has good cause to believe that any member of the Commission's standing appeals body should not hear the institution's or system's appeal, it shall notify the Chief Global Accreditation Officer in writing of the basis for its objection at the time it submits its written appeal. See Policy 7.4(e).
- iv.** Objections to the composition of the Panel shall be heard and ruled upon by the Chair of the Cognia Global Commission in consultation with the Chief Accreditation Officer.
- f.** Within thirty (30) calendar days following receipt of the written appeal, Cognia shall submit its written response to the Chief Global Accreditation Officer with a copy to the institution or system.
- g.** A Panel of three impartial evaluators shall be selected by the Cognia Chief Global Accreditation Officer, and confirmed by the Cognia Global Commission, to hear the institution's or system's appeal. The Panel shall be selected from a standing appeals body appointed by the Cognia Global Commission to serve for staggered three-year terms.
 - i.** The standing appeals body shall be comprised of educators who are knowledgeable about accreditation and certification requirements but do not hold any other appointed, paid, or elected position with Cognia.

The Chief Global Accreditation Officer will promptly notify the institution or system of the names of the members of the Appeals Panel and the date and place of the hearing.

The Chief Global Accreditation Officer will transmit a copy of the institution's or system's appeal documents and Cognia's written response to each member of the Appeals Panel in advance of the hearing.

- h.** Within sixty (60) calendar days of receipt of the institution's or system's written appeal, the Appeals Panel will hold the hearing.
 - i.** The institution or system shall not have the right to cross-examine individual agents of Cognia staff. Additionally, Cognia staff shall not have the right to cross-examine representatives of the institution or system. The appeals hearing is not a court proceeding and is not intended to be adversarial. It is the role of the Appeals Panel to consider the merits of each party's arguments along with supporting evidence when making its determination.
 - ii.** Cognia may request that its legal counsel be present to advise the panel members on matters relating to the Policy.
 - iii.** The appeal hearing may be held virtually or at a physical location, at the discretion of the Cognia Global Accreditation Officer.
 - iv.** The institution or system may request that the appeal hearing be transcribed. No audio- tapping, video-taping, or other recording of the appeal is permitted.

- v.** Evidence in support of the appeal shall be limited to that evidence presented to Cognia prior to making its adverse accrediting action except as hereinafter provided. The Appeals Panel shall consider evidence bearing only upon the grounds specified for the appeal. Additional written materials or evidence not presented to Cognia at the time of its original decision as a part of its review (or of its decision following a remand as provided in Policy 7.4(l)ii. may not be presented to the Appeals Panel.
- vi.** Other than at the appeals hearing, the Appeals Panel shall not meet with representatives of either the institution or system or Cognia.
- i.** The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be determined by majority vote. The Appeals Panel shall meet in executive session to reach its decision following the close of hearing. Appeals hearings shall not be conducted as a judicial proceeding. Rules of evidence, pre-hearing discovery, the right to subpoena witnesses, and the right to cross examine witnesses shall not be permitted, provided however, members of the Appeals Panel may ask questions of the institution or system and Cognia's representatives present at a hearing.
- j.** The institution or system appealing an adverse accrediting action shall bear the burden of proof and may be represented by legal counsel at the hearing to present or assist in the presentation of the institution's or system's appeal. Cognia may elect to be represented by legal counsel at the hearing in the event the institution or system is represented by counsel.
- k.** The chairperson of the Appeals Panel may limit the presentations of the institution or system and Cognia to one half hour each, provided however, the time for presentations and questioning may be extended to either or both parties as determined in the sole discretion of the chairperson.
 - i.** The order of presentation shall be first, the institution or system and second, Cognia.
 - ii.** Within the sole discretion of the chairperson as to time and scope, the Appeals Panel may permit the institution or system to present final comments and/or arguments following Cognia's presentation.
 - iii.** Nothing herein shall be deemed to require either the institution or system or Cognia to make any oral presentation at the Appeals Panel hearing and the failure to do so shall have no bearing or relevance in reaching a decision by the Appeals Panel.
- l.** The Appeals Panel decision shall include the Panel's ruling together with the reasons therefore as well as any additional information deemed pertinent by the Panel and shall be the only written decision of the Panel.
 - i.** Within ten (10) calendar days of the close of the hearing, the Appeals Panel decision shall be filed by the Appeals Panel with the Chief Global Accreditation Officer.
 - ii.** The Appeals Panel shall have the authority to affirm, reverse or remand the Adverse Action and will direct the Commission to implement the decision in a manner consistent with the Appeals Panel's decisions or instructions. In a decision to remand the adverse action to the Commission for further consideration, the Appeals Panel must identify specific issues that the Commission must address.
 - iii.** Within seven (7) calendar days of filing its decision with the Chief Global Accreditation Officer, the Appeals Panel shall inform the institution or system and the Cognia Global Commission of its decision.

- m.** All expenses of the appeal, including all expenses of the members of the Appeals Panel, are to be borne fully by the institution or system submitting the appeal.
- n.** The Appeals Panel can either, affirm, reverse or remand the decision to the Cognia Global Commission for reconsideration. If the Appeals Panel,
 - i.** Affirms the decision of the Cognia Global Commission, the action is final.
 - ii.** Reverses the decision of the Cognia Global Commission, the action is final.
 - iii.** Remands the decision to the Cognia Global Commission for further consideration and the Commission adheres to its original decision, the matter shall be considered final.



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