cognia®

Performance Standards

for Education Service Organizations

Introduction: What makes a quality education service organization?

A quality education service organization succeeds when it supports every client every day, offering opportunities for every learner to reach further.

One hallmark of a quality education service organization is that it continually strives for improvement. Like the member institutions we serve, Cognia® works to innovate and improve. In spring 2024, we completed a research and development cycle to create Cognia Performance Standards specific to education service organizations to acknowledge unique needs and set expectations for quality education service organizations in a new era. Based on current research in education and input from practitioners with experience in organizations providing education services to districts, schools, educators, and students, the development process assures that the standards at the foundation of our improvement and accreditation strategies are viable, feasible, and relevant to organizations in today's world.

Significant concepts

The standards also include several significant concepts to guide education service organizations forward, including:

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS: The standards describe the elements of effective organizational practices that result in relevant, impactful services and supports for clients.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES: The standards emphasize the expectation of collaboration and positive relationships across interactions within the organization and with external stakeholders.

RELEVANT AND ACCOUNTABLE: The standards focus on all aspects of organization functioning to ensure transparent, effective, and sustainable practices, with expectations for accountability at all levels.

Quality characteristics

Four key characteristics are evident when education service organizations effectively adopt the Cognia Performance Standards and engage in Cognia's third-party review process for accreditation and continuous improvement.

HEALTHY CULTURE: An education service organization where personnel are connected to the mission and work, demonstrating alignment with values, and fostering positive relationships.

QUALITY LEADERSHIP: Leaders at all levels model and support effective leadership practices, communicate clear expectations, and promote ongoing professional development.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: The organization continually improves by measuring progress, reflecting on past results, and being accountable for outcomes, ensuring efficiency and client satisfaction.

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT: Focused on client needs, the organization uses data to develop and refine products and services, demonstrating positive impact and building trust with clients.

These characteristics serve as our model for identifying and discussing organization quality.

Framework for improvement

Our new standards and the key characteristics are the foundation for Cognia's approach to continuous improvement—not just to accreditation. These are the elements that should guide every educational institution to ensure high-quality teaching and learning and overall organizational effectiveness.

The new Cognia Performance Standards for Education Service Organizations, which will be in effect on July 1, 2024, define the practices of a good education service organization and provide the criteria for improvement efforts that will energetically and visibly grow clients and the organization.

Key Characteristic 1: Healthy Culture

A high-performing education service organization nurtures and sustains a culture where personnel feel connected to the purpose and work of the organization and behave in alignment with the organization's values and norms. The organization reflects its mission, beliefs, and expectations by improving outcomes and supporting its clients. The organization models behaviors that build and maintain positive relationships among personnel and with clients.

Keys to a healthy culture

A healthy culture is evident when organization personnel:

- Are actively engaged in, committed to, and supportive of the organization's vision and mission.
- Offer ideas and collaborate with leaders and peers in a safe environment.
- Demonstrate a willingness to change for improvement.
- Build trust with client institutions.

STANDARD 1
Personnel cultivate and sustain a culture of respect, trust, and fairness.

STANDARD 2
Personnel are engaged in and committed to supporting the purpose and mission of the organization.

STANDARD 3
Personnel behaviors and actions embrace change that benefits the organization.

STANDARD 4
Personnel foster a healthy environment of well-being and positive relationships.

STANDARD 5
Personnel embrace collegiality and collaboration within the organization and with clients.

STANDARD 6
The organization establishes fair and reliable practices and processes that build trust with clients.

STANDARD 7
Personnel maintain high expectations for themselves and others in the organization.

Key Characteristic 2: Quality Leadership

A high-performing education service organization promotes and supports leadership at all levels within the organization. Leaders model expected behavior and support others to engage in effective leadership practices. Leaders communicate expectations for all personnel with consistency and purpose, and model positive interactions with personnel and clients.

Keys to quality leadership

Quality leadership is evident when leaders:

- Model effective leadership practices and expectations while supporting others to do so.
- Communicate clear expectations for the organization's work and service to clients.
- Institute embedded professional learning and self-improvement for all staff.

STANDARD 8
Leaders focus on client needs to drive the effective allocation and management of human, material, digital, and fiscal resources.

STANDARD 9
The governing authority demonstrates a commitment to the purpose and mission of the organization by collaborating with leaders to uphold the organization's priorities and to drive continuous improvement.

STANDARD 10
Leaders model and cultivate effective individual and collective leadership skills among personnel.

STANDARD 11
Leaders attract and retain qualified personnel who support the organization's purpose and direction.

STANDARD 12
Leaders create and maintain organizational structures and processes that support personnel and clients in both stable and changing environments.

STANDARD 13
Leaders implement personnel supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.

STANDARD 14
Leaders create opportunities that invite inquiry, reflection, and dialogue about professional practice and issues relevant to the organization and/or programs and services.

Key Characteristic 3: Organizational Effectiveness

A high-performing education service organization continually identifies and pursues areas for improvement, and consistently measures progress at all levels within the organization. Personnel in the organization embrace a growth mindset that includes evidence-based reflection on past results and a willingness to adapt and change, where and when needed. The organization defines expected outcomes for accountability of personnel, improvement in processes and results, client satisfaction, and efficiency of operations.

Keys to organizational effectiveness

Organizational effectiveness is demonstrated when:

- Measures of success are clearly defined throughout all levels of the organization and success against those measures is celebrated.
- All personnel implement improvement/action plans with fidelity.
- Personnel reflect on valid prior results, plan accordingly, and are held accountable for action items related to improvement priorities.
- The organization is financially stable and upholds public trust.

STANDARD 15
Personnel create organizational and individual growth goal(s) with defined measures aligned to the organization's mission and vision.

· ·

STANDARD 16
Personnel engage in and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of a continuous improvement process to better meet client needs.

· ·

STANDARD 17
Leaders use data and input from a variety of sources to make decisions, anticipate client needs, and inform the organization's continuous improvement.

· ·

STANDARD 18
The organization demonstrates financial stability and transparency.

· ·

Key Characteristic 4: Client Engagement and Impact

A high-performing education service organization focuses on client needs and satisfaction. Positive and trustworthy client interaction is at the heart of the organization's work. The organization collects and uses client data to guide development and implementation of new products and services and for refinement of existing products and services. The organization also collects and reports the impact its products and services have had on client needs.

Keys to client engagement and impact

Client engagement and impact are demonstrated when:

- The organization can demonstrate that their products and services have met client needs and the needs of the learners those clients serve.
- Decisions about products and services are based on facts and data from a variety of valid sources.
- Clients are included in the product development and refinement process.
- Clients report trust in and positive interactions with the organization.

STANDARD 19
Personnel ensure the timely delivery and effective implementation of programs and services including training and ongoing support for staff and for clients.

STANDARD 20
Personnel evaluate the impact of the organization's programs and services to ensure relevant, effective, and sustainable outcomes for clients and their learners.

STANDARD 21
Personnel collaborate with clients to develop and deliver programs and services that meet client needs.

STANDARD 22
Personnel engage in the work of the organization with integrity, honesty, professionalism, and collaboration as well as positive interaction with clients and colleagues.

cognia®

cognia.org