West Fargo Proves to be One of the Best Districts in Nation

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Every district in the state of North Dakota is required to have an external review every five years by a team consisting of trained educators from across the nation.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction partners with a group called Cognia to do this continuous improvement work. Cognia (formerly AdvancED) does this work in over 35,000 schools in over 80 countries.

The goal of our reviews is to help districts improve outcomes for ALL learners. Some districts may not love this process, but in WFPS, we enjoy hosting a visit and showing educators from around the nation and our region what we are all about.

You may be wondering what this external team does. They interview more than 250 stakeholders (inclusive of administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and community partners) to evaluate the district's performance against the Cognia Performance Standards. They analyze various documents including board monitoring reports, student achievement data, district communications and stakeholder surveys.

Most importantly, the team assesses the quality of our learning environments by observing instruction in more than 50 classrooms across the district. In order to determine if we met the standards, the team seeks to answer the following questions: Do we provide equitable, safe, supportive, and active learning environments across the district? Do we have high expectations for all learners, both students and staff members? Do we have a process for continuous improvement, and do we monitor it? Do we provide digital learning environments to prepare today's learners for tomorrow's world? Does the district have strong leadership? Are we utilizing resources equitably and responsibly? Do we have processes and protocols in place to ensure efficiencies across the district?

On Jan. 13, we received the results from our November review. There are 31 standards across the domains of Leadership, Learning, and Resources. Each standard is ranked on a four-point scale; achieving a three is the goal, while receiving a four shows exceptional effort. I am excited to share that West Fargo Public Schools received the highest ranking of four on each domain.

Only one of the 31 standards ranked a three or improving. In addition to ranking each standard, the external team uses the data collected to create an Index of Education Quality® (IEQ) score. Cognia provides the IEQ as a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of standards and review criteria. The IEQ is comprised of the ratings from the three domains and are reported on a scale of 100 to 400. An IEQ score below 250 indicates that the institution has several areas within the "Initiate" level and should focus their improvement efforts there. An IEQ in the range of 250-300 indicates that the institution has several standards within the "Improve" level and is using results to inform continuous improvement and demonstrate sustainability.

This range is good. An IEQ of 300 and above indicates the institution is reaching an "Impact" level and is engaged in practices that are sustained over time and are becoming engrained in the culture of the institution. WFPS scored a 330, well above the average in our network, but more importantly, we improved our previous IEQ by more than 100

points. This is truly something our community can celebrate! There is a great deal to take away from the report, but at a high level, we have built a strong system that boasts a supportive, empowering, and compassionate culture rich in high expectations and support for staff, students, and families. As far as improving the system, the team confirmed the need to integrate digital resources into instruction and operations. We have grown at a rapid rate and processes we have used in the past are not necessarily the processes we need now with the increased numbers of students and employees.

This work started prior to the visit (Fall 2019) and is reflected in our budget and operational planning. The best part of the continuous improvement process is the affirmation that the initiatives, training, and system planning are effective and should be continued. It is also reaffirming when the review team points out areas we can improve. We often get too close to the work and don't always see that the ways we have always done something might not be the most efficient and may actually be taking energy and resources away from the areas that can have a profound impact on student learning. Our amazing results are not one person, one department, or one school. We achieved these results because of our educators with a growth mindset, a supportive community, systems thinking, collaboration, and the alignment of resources.

"The best part of the continuous improvement process is the affirmation that the initiatives, training, and system planning are effective and should be continued."

If you see a teacher, principal, or any support staff member, please let them know you appreciate their efforts to make West Fargo Public Schools the district of choice.

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