

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 9, 2025



- Agenda Item:** Cognia Renewal Application Approval
- State Board Priority:** Goal 2
- State Board Role/Authority:** Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16 grants authority to the State Board to maintain a list of approved independent accrediting agencies.
- Presenter(s):** Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant
Bureau of School Improvement
- Dennis McClain, Education Program Consultant
Bureau of School Improvement
- Andrea Danker, Education Program Consultant
Bureau of School improvement
- Attachment(s):** One
- Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Cognia Renewal Application as a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” and grant the agency authority to continue to accredit nonpublic schools in the state of Iowa.
- Background:** A nonpublic school may be accredited by an independent accrediting agency that appears on a list maintained by the State Board of Education. The list shall include accrediting agencies that, as of January 1, 2013, accredited a

nonpublic school in this state that was concurrently accredited under this section; and any agency that has a formalized partnership agreement with another agency on the list and has member schools in this state as of January 1, 2013. Five agencies met this standard at the enactment of these rules:

- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
- Christian Schools International (CSI)
- Cognia (formerly AdvancEd)
- National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Four agencies have been approved by the State Board:

- American Montessori Society (May 2014)
- Middle States Association-Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (January 2024)
- Accrediting Commission for Western Association of Schools and Colleges (January 2024)
- Association of Classical Christian Schools (March 2024)

Cognia

Background

Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16 grants authority to the State Board to maintain a list of approved independent accrediting agencies. Agencies on this list may accredit nonpublic schools.

During the March 2024 meeting, the State Board of Education directed the Iowa Department of Education (Department) develop and implement a review process for approved accrediting agencies. Agencies that have been approved for five or more years were asked to submit an application for Continuation as a Reliable Authority Concerning the Quality of Education Offered by a School to determine whether the organization is a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” offered by an accredited nonpublic school.

The questions in the application have two purposes: (1) to determine the organization’s reliability in its accreditation authority, and (2) to determine the organization’s capability of helping schools maintain programs of acceptable quality. The deadline to apply to continue to be an approved independent accrediting agency to be placed on the state approved list was November 1, 2024. The applicant was notified via email the application was received before the deadline and was under review.

Cognia currently accredits eight schools in Iowa.

Application Review Process

The application review process included three readers. Each individual read all applications and utilized the scoring matrix aligned to the application. After individual readers reviewed and scored each application independently, readers discussed the application and came to a consensus on the application’s scores. The scoring matrix below indicates the scores assigned to Cognia.

Section	Rationale	Score
Section A. Organization Information	The application did not provide clear description of certifications and licenses.	27/32
Section B. Accreditation Standards	The application provided limited information on the contract management process. Applicant was very detailed in the description of professional staff as well as the professional development process.	45/50
Section C. Accreditation Process	The application was clear on ensuring compliance with state requirements. Agency uses a logic model in determining effectiveness. The application provided a thorough description of the process to suspend or remove accreditation from a school.	20/20
Section D. Organization Structure, Citations	The application provided evidence of detailed fiscal, data, and contract management practices and procedures.	8/8 to -8
Section E. Additional Information (no points)	The agency currently accredits 23,208 institutions.	N/A
Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)	Recommended	100/110

Recommendation Table

Score Range	Recommendation
83-110 (75%+)	Recommended
66-83 (60-74%)	Recommended subject to conditions or assurances
<66 (<59%)	Not Recommended

Recommendation

Cognia received a consensus score of 100 across the required components in the application. It is recommended that the State Board approve the Cognia application to continue to accredit Iowa nonpublic schools as stated in the Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16.

Appendices

[Application Materials](#)