

**Ohio Senate  
Education Committee  
May 3, 2023  
Interested Party Testimony on Learning Acceleration  
Substitute House Bill 33**

Good afternoon, Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for hearing public comment on the importance of investing in students, schools and districts to support learning acceleration. Learning acceleration, while most recently discussed in response to COVID-19 school closures, is a broad topic, and any discussion of it *must* include how we are supporting our lowest performing schools, which is what I'm here to discuss. My name is Morgan Eaves, and I am the Director of Advocacy for Cognia, a nonprofit organization that works everyday to support student outcomes through the process of continuous improvement.

With a footprint that goes back over 120 years and covers 36,000 schools, Cognia has impacted over 18 million students by supporting state, district and school leaders to move beyond compliance-based improvement efforts and instead engage in continuous improvement with fidelity and intention. By utilizing experts who have themselves successfully conducted turnaround and improvement work, Cognia is able to partner with schools to uncover root causes of underperformance. This allows us to work alongside school and district leaders, parents and community stakeholders to develop a tailored plan to remove those barriers to improvement, and the capacity and expertise to implement, monitor and adjust the plan to ensure real and sustainable improvement is happening, changing not just the student outcomes, but the school itself.

This method isn't rocket science, and it isn't "takeover" turnaround. Instead, Cognia's approach is about collaboration, education and sustainability, and it's worked in urban, suburban and rural schools in Montana, North Dakota, Arkansas, Michigan, Kentucky, Alabama and, most recently, Tennessee, where a turnaround pilot program has turned into success for two Memphis schools.

In 2021, Tennessee passed the School Turnaround Pilot Program Act, which created a pilot program for schools in need of intervention. These were schools that were chronically on the priority list and struggling to move beyond that designation. Pursuant to the legislation, each school would partner with an approved turnaround expert of their choice and, as a result, Cognia began its partnership with two Memphis schools during the 2021-2022 school year. **Since that time, our partnership has led to both schools making drastic improvements: in one year both schools have more than doubled their proficiency in math and English language arts, with one school exiting priority status for the first time in over a decade, and the second school meeting the state's target graduation rate for the first time in over a decade.**

These results happened because of Cognia's emphasis on collaboration. Before work began, Cognia conducted a listening tour, meeting with state, district and local education leaders, parents and community members to better understand the needs and struggles of each school and to hear thoughts on how to move each school forward. Both schools completed a comprehensive needs assessment, in which Cognia teams listened, learned, and collected data and input from school stakeholders and staff members, ending with a report on both the triumphs and struggles in the areas of leadership capacity, learning capacity and resource capacity, as well as three to five improvement priorities. These priorities were then turned into

a turnaround improvement plan, composed of three-to-five specific, measurable, time-bound initiatives assigned to accountable owners and grounded in strategies and action steps designed to address the priority needs identified during the discovery process.

Once implementation of the plan began, Cognia was in each school consistently, ensuring implementation was happening with fidelity and evaluating results in real-time. This on-the-ground approach isn't just about supporting implementation of the turnaround plan, but also allows for the spirit of continuous improvement-the process of assessing, planning, implementing and monitoring-to take root, leading to the sustainability of outcomes.

Why am I talking about Tennessee? Because what Tennessee did is attainable. And, with so many Ohio schools falling into priority and focus status, the need for more support is apparent. Ohio has tried the traditional takeover model and, and as other states have found, it doesn't work. A pilot model that focuses on helping the most at-need schools in a collaborative way, that celebrates strengths while uncovering root causes of underperformance and turns those barriers into improvement opportunities, *can* work. And, while it will improve student outcomes, it will *also* shift how school leaders work together with all stakeholders to think about and engage in improvement, giving leaders and staff the skills they need to meet improvement challenges head on in the future.

This body can lead the charge on this change and invest in such a pilot program. And I encourage you to do so. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.