

Case Study

Montgomery Public Schools: Steady improvements

Turnaround to success Educational Service Agency School System United States Accreditation Diagnostic Review Public

Montgomery, AL

Montgomery Public Schools in Montgomery, Alabama, used Cognia's analysis of its underlying issues and continuing guidance to overcome a range of challenges, restoring the faith of both the state board of education and the local community. Learn more about pathways to improvement with [Cognia membership](#).

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Challenges

Montgomery Public Schools (MPS) in Alabama was struggling with finances, board governance, academic performance, and student absenteeism. In fact, the state had designated more than half of MPS schools as underperforming, resulting in state intervention. The district had been without a chief financial officer for several years. Its annual filings with the state had lapsed, and the district hadn't maintained the required budget reserve for years. Compounding the problems, school board members weren't getting along, and the board's internal operations had been neglected for years. Academically, MPS was falling short in providing equitable learning opportunities and a learning culture for success. Student engagement—a critical factor in student success—was low.

Solutions

Dr. Ann Roy Moore, an experienced district leader, was asked to step in to oversee a turnaround. Having worked with Cognia before, Dr. Moore knew that a partnership between MPS and Cognia would get results. Cognia conducted a Special Review, in which a team of education specialists analyzed the district's policies, instructional programs, resources, and overall operations. From this, they identified a staggering number (31) of areas in need of improvement at MPS. A new strategic plan, disciplined cost cutting, and board training were among the initiatives taken for improvement. Collaborative leadership across the district helped communicate and carry out needed changes, including a significant reduction in staffing from the central office to schools.

Results

Since 2018, the district has made significant improvement on all fronts. It exceeded its financial targets, and improved relationships, roles, and processes in the school board. When Cognia returned to the district in 2020 to conduct an Accreditation Engagement Review, its evaluation showed that the district's performance on the Cognia Performance Standards had jumped from 3% in the "Improving" category to 90%. Likewise, in those two years, MPS's grade on the Alabama report card climbed from a D (69 out of 100) to a C (74 out of 100). The district's test scores, graduation rates, measures of college and career readiness, and absenteeism rates had all improved in the DOE's measures. In 2021, the state board voted to release MPS from intervention. On December 1 of that year, the district became independent of state oversight, to great local acclaim.

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