

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

August 1, 2024



Agenda Item:

Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) Interim Accreditation Report

State Board Priority:

Goal 4: Provide all students with multiple pathways for postsecondary success through high-quality career and academic programs and planning.

State Board Role/Authority:

Iowa Code section 260C.47(3) grants authority to the State Board of Education to determine whether the programs of a community college shall remain accredited.

Presenter(s):

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Dave Dahms, President
Northeast Iowa Community College

Kathleen Nacos-Burds, Vice President of Academic Affairs
Northeast Iowa Community College

Attachment(s):

One

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation for NICC. A state comprehensive visit will be conducted in academic year 2028-2029.

Background:

Attached is a report of the evaluation of NICC for continued state accreditation as an associate degree-granting institution. The Iowa Department of Education conducted the interview portion of the evaluation on February 12-13, 2024. This report reflects the review team's observations and determinations made during NICC's interim visit. As mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47, the accreditation team, including two external peer reviewers, assessed NICC's compliance with eight Iowa State Accreditation Standards via a structured process of document review and interviews. The team also reviewed the most recent Higher Learning Commission (HLC) institutional accreditation report to ensure that any findings have been addressed. Iowa's process has been designed to complement rather than duplicate the HLC accreditation process.



Department of Education

Accreditation Report Interim State Evaluation

Northeast Iowa Community College
February 12-13, 2024 – Fiscal Year 2023-2024

June 2024

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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Amy Gieseke, Section Chief

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Interim Accreditation Evaluation
Fiscal Year 2024 (Academic Year 2023-2024)

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Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) Interim Accreditation Evaluation Fiscal Year 2024 – Conducted February 12-13, 2024

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this review was a scheduled accreditation evaluation of Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) as mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47.

Institutional Overview

College History¹

In 1966, the State Board of Education approved the formation of the Area I Vocational-Technical School, with Calmar as its administrative headquarters. This included public school districts in Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard and Winneshiek counties, as well as sections of Bremer, Buchanan and Mitchell counties.

On September 5, 1967, career education programs in Calmar began with 170 students enrolled in 12 programs. The school broke ground on construction of college facilities on the 210-acre Calmar campus, which now include Darwin L. Schrage Administration Building, Max Clark Hall, Wilder Business Center, Industrial Technologies, Student Center, Agricultural Technologies, Child Development Center and Iowa's Dairy Center, a \$4.1 million dairy education center and applied research laboratory built in 2000. The merged Area I Vocational-Technical School was enlarged in 1970 to include the public school districts in Dubuque and Delaware counties and sections of Jones and Jackson counties. In 1971, career education programs in Dubuque began at several locations throughout the city, including the Roshek building.

In April 1979, the Area I Vocational-Technical School changed its name to Northeast Iowa Technical Institute. That same year, the Peosta campus was established. The Peosta campus currently includes the main building, the Gas Utilities and Construction Building, a child development center, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety and most recently the Industrial Technologies Building, which opened in August 2010.

In 1988, the institute was authorized by the Iowa Board of Education to award the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degrees, as well as diplomas and certificates. The institute changed its name to Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC).

NICC has since expanded to include service locations in Cresco, Dubuque, New Hampton, Manchester, Oelwein and Waukon. The purpose of these locations is to bring education and training to students where they live and to serve as a catalyst for economic development. A prime example of NICC's commitment to economic development occurred in 2008 when the college's Town Clock Business Center in Dubuque was expanded to include a one-stop center with Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA).

In December 2007, taxpayers passed (by supermajority) a \$35 million renovation and construction bond levy for NICC. These funds supported construction and renovation of the industrial technologies buildings on each campus, the student center on the Calmar campus, renovations to the health and science labs and a new library on the Peosta campus, Darwin L. Schrage Administration building in Calmar and the Wilder Business Center, which opened in January 2013. In 2018, NICC had a \$39 million bond issue approved by their region's voters. The funding supported renovations to the Peosta campus Main Building and Max Clark Hall on the Calmar campus, and updates to educational programming and services, infrastructure, security and technology. This, again, demonstrates the communities' acknowledgement of the college's value to the northeast region of Iowa.

Institutional Profile²

Northeast Iowa Community College is a public, two-year comprehensive community college serving a mostly rural, eight-county district in northeast Iowa. According to its college profile, published annually by the Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness, in 2022 NICC serviced 5,511 credit students and ranked 9th in enrollment out of Iowa's 15 community colleges and 1st in joint enrollment, with 52.1 percent of its credit students being in high school taking concurrent enrollment courses. Furthermore, NICC ranked 5th in the state graduation rate and 6th in the state success rate (i.e., graduated and/or transferred to a four-year institution).

NICC offers 84 credit programs at its campuses and via distance learning, customized business and industry training, short-term certification options and adult education and literacy. The college ranks 6th in students enrolled in distance learning and 2nd in noncredit student enrollment with 18,163 students. The college is committed to high-quality education and training at an affordable price to ensure the growth and vitality of northeast Iowa.

NICC's service area spans 5,000 square miles and is served by two campuses in Calmar and Peosta, six centers in Dubuque (two locations) and centers in Oelwein, Waukon, Cresco and Manchester. In addition, NICC provides services in New Hampton and hosts the region's Small Business Development Center in Dubuque, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety in Peosta and Iowa's Dairy Center in Calmar. With all of these sites, NICC ranks 4th in community penetration rate (i.e., the percentage of the region's college-age population attending the college) with credit and noncredit student enrollment combined.

As a testament to how well NICC serves its expansive, diverse region, the college, governed by a nine-member elected Board of Trustees, was named among the 2011 Aspen Top Ten community colleges in the nation for its successful graduate outcomes, academic excellence and community impact.

Visit Overview

Staff from the Department's Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness performed an interim accreditation review and site visit of NICC on February 12-13, 2024. During the visit, the accreditation team was impressed with NICC. Despite a challenging environment, it was apparent that NICC staff and faculty are committed to continuous improvement and to the needs of students. It was also clear that the college is proactively working towards a culture of transparency, communication, trust-building and assessment. NICC also prides itself on a culture of innovation and is forward-thinking about the needs of their communities and businesses they serve.

¹ Information for this section was primarily obtained from: nicc.edu/about/history

² Information for this section was obtained from the NICC Website and from the 2022 NICC Community College Profile Report.

Assurance Summary State Standards

The college's previous comprehensive accreditation report from 2018 required the college to follow up on findings in two areas. In the area of faculty qualifications, the Department found at its fiscal year (FY) 2019 comprehensive visit that there were concerns with the qualifications for two faculty members. Additionally, in the area of special needs, the Department found that there was inconsistency with the continuous nondiscrimination statement and its inclusion in all publications and the annual nondiscrimination statement was missing required elements. There were also recommendations noted during the last state accreditation visit, including a strong recommendation related to the alignment of professional development activities with instructional competencies and strategic initiatives. During the FY24 interim accreditation visit, the Department team was impressed with improvements made to the continuous and annual nondiscrimination statements. Additionally, it was noted that since moving the tracking of professional development to an electronic system, professional development activities are now aligned with instructional competencies. However, although the college was able to demonstrate that faculty members were adequately qualified, there were still concerns with the documentation involved in qualifying faculty, with a finding in this area during the interim review.

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Department accreditation team reviewed the most recent HLC report and information available at the time of this evaluation. NICC's most recent HLC accreditation letter provided adequate evidence that the college has continuing institutional accreditation with no issues, concerns or findings documented. NICC, which is on the standard HLC pathway, received an HLC reaffirmation of accreditation through 2026-2027. During its FY16 comprehensive visit, HLC documented concerns with assessment of student learning, concurrent enrollment faculty evaluation and the overall quality, coordination and monitoring of curriculum across various locations and methods of delivery. These issues were addressed in an interim report due to HLC in 2018. The report from NICC's mid-cycle review in 2020 was positive with no findings. It was evident from site visit interviews that NICC has been working since their last comprehensive visit to resolve issues related to the assessment of student learning. The Department team noted that the assessment culture has greatly improved at the college, including more faculty buy-in with assessment of student learning.

Faculty Qualifications

All community college-employed instructors who are under contract as of July 1, 2011, who teach in CTE or arts and sciences (including adjuncts) must meet minimum faculty standards (Iowa Code section 260C.48). The Department team provided NICC a random list of 25 faculty members who taught credit courses the previous year. The college then submitted personnel files for these faculty regarding qualifications, including supporting documentation such as college transcripts and employment applications, to illustrate related work experience and third-party licensure/certification, if applicable. The Department team then examined the files to determine whether the qualifications of each faculty member complied with Iowa Code for the courses they taught during AY 22-23 (i.e., fall 2022 and spring 2023).

Following a thorough review of the 25 personnel files, members of the Department team met with NICC's chief academic officer (CAO), academic deans and director of human resources to learn about the college's faculty qualification review process and to discuss concerns raised during the file review. The majority of faculty files demonstrated that the college utilizes the appropriate faculty qualification review process distributed by the statewide Faculty Standards Council in an effort to establish statewide consistency and compliance with HLC and Iowa criteria.

The Department team **recommends** the following:

- Formalize the process for adding new prefixes for which faculty members can teach. The college may want to consider exploring the functionality of their student information system (SIS), which would prevent faculty members from being assigned to course prefixes for which they have not been qualified by the institution.
- Develop an institutional definition of “recent and relevant” work experience. When qualifying CTE faculty, identify and document how the instructor’s experiences meets this definition of recent and relevant. This institutional definition could be adapted by the department or discipline as appropriate, but would give a baseline expectation.
- Continue reviewing the faculty qualifications form being used by each department to ensure the most up-to-date form is being used consistently across campus.

Finding: During the review of faculty files and site visit, the team noted the following issues related to the documentation of faculty qualifications:

- Some faculty files were missing documentation, such as transcripts, rationale and/or evidence of qualifications. For instructors with a master’s degree in a discipline other than the one they are teaching, it was not always clear where the appropriate graduate credit hours were coming from on the transcript. Relevant and recent work experience and specialized training should be documented and this documentation should be formalized for more consistency across the college.

To address this finding, **the Department will be reviewing 20 randomly selected faculty files in six months to verify that qualification documentation is adequate and consistent. The Department team will also review NICC’s process for qualifying faculty to confirm that adequate procedures are in place to support the institution in consistently and thoroughly qualifying faculty.**

Faculty Teaching Load

The teaching loads of full-time instructors must not exceed the faculty load limits set forth in Iowa Code. This is the case for CTE instructors, as well as for arts and sciences instructors (Iowa Code section 260C.48). To check compliance with this standard, the Department team reviewed the instructional loads of a random sample of 20 faculty members for whom NICC provided documentation of their AY 22-23 teaching loads. A discussion with the CAO, academic deans and director of human resources about load processes clarified the steps taken by the college to load both arts and science and CTE faculty. NICC does not have a policy regarding reduced load for new faculty, but the college does give the deans autonomy to reduce the load of first-time instructors in creative ways. The Department team was impressed with how the college gives credit for advising toward teaching load.

NICC provided adequate documentation of the teaching loads for faculty under review, and the documentation and explanation provided demonstrated that instructional loads were compliant. During the on-site visit, there was concern expressed by some faculty about inconsistent load policy implementation across the college. Additionally, some faculty members felt they were not asked to approve a teaching overload assignment before it was assigned to them. Several faculty members stated that by the time they were aware of the overload it was too late to communicate that they did not want the additional load or that there might be consequences for refusing the additional load. Based on this, it is **strongly recommended** that NICC implement a formal mutual consent process that consists of a signed contract that allows faculty time to deny an overload assignment as required by Iowa Administrative Code chapter 24.5(2). **The Department team will follow-up in six months to ensure that this mutual consent process has been established at NICC and is being used across all academic departments.**

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Special Needs and Protected Classes

Community colleges shall provide equal access to the full range of program offerings and services including, but not limited to, recruitment, enrollment and placement activities for students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulation. Students with disabilities shall be given access to the full range of program offerings at a college through reasonable accommodations (Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 24.5(3)), with information regarding how to access such accommodations provided in a disability statement. In addition, community colleges shall have continuous and annual nondiscrimination statements ensuring access to educational programs and employment for state and federally protected classes. This nondiscrimination statement must list all state and federally protected classes; provide the name/title and contact information of the person(s) designated to coordinate equity, Title IX and Section 504 compliance and provide contact information for the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in Chicago, Illinois. The nondiscrimination and disability statements may be separate or the college may choose to combine them.

The Department team conducted a desk review prior to the on-site visit, in which they reviewed NICC's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and nondiscrimination policies, statements and practices in marketing and recruitment publications, handbooks, the college catalog, the college website and sample course syllabi. During the on-site visit, the team reviewed additional documentation and interviewed faculty, students and staff to ensure compliance with this standard.

During the on-site visit, the Department team saw evidence of numerous college-wide efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students, provide accommodations for students with special needs and provide opportunities for underrepresented students in particular programs of study. Some of these observed efforts include:

- The college is transparent about which CTE programs have different requirements for students and includes instructions on where to find this information.
- Students were aware of the services available to them, such as TRIO and library services, and appeared to utilize services frequently. Several students referred to faculty and staff involved with these services by name.
- NICC utilizes a "Care Team" comprised of staff from across campus. These staff make weekly calls to students who are identified as needing their services.
- The college has implemented a formal review process of student service areas, which is a good practice.
- Students have the opportunity to participate in an emerging-leaders program, which trains them on how to be a better leader and incorporates different types of team building activities.
- There are numerous scholarship and funding opportunities for students as evidenced by the 115 foundation scholarships that the college awards to students three times per year. Students have the opportunity to apply for mini-grants to help with books, gas and basic needs. There is also a CRISIS fund for students dealing with a major life crisis and a food pantry for those in need.
- The "common" hour built into the course schedule allows students to participate in student life events, Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) meetings, visit days and other types of programming.

The Department accreditation team applauds NICC's commitment to the success of all students.

During on-site interviews, a number of faculty and staff expressed concern that if they were to bring forward a complaint through the complaint process, the complaint would not be kept confidential and that they feared retribution for making a complaint. It is **strongly recommended** that the complaint process be carefully reviewed and outlined to ensure both confidentiality and to ensure staff are not penalized for bringing forward a complaint. The Department team also **recommends** the following:

- Discontinue use of the shortened version of the continuous nondiscrimination statement.
- Although there was much better consistency with the continuous nondiscrimination statement, there were still instances of inconsistent statements. The college should ensure that the statement is consistent and present across all publications (e.g., Senior Year Plus materials, Facilities Plan, etc.).
- Add specific names, titles, telephone numbers and email addresses for the Title IX and equity coordinators to the annual notice of nondiscrimination.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

CTE Program Evaluations and Review

Iowa Code section 258, Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 46.7(4) and Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 24.5(4) include a variety of state standards related to the offering of career and technical education (CTE) programs. These standards include numerous requirements related to program and award length, program content, labor market demand, articulation, advisory committees and more. All CTE programs (including new programs and changes to existing programs) must be approved by the Department. Standards for CTE programs are included in the *Program Approval: Guidelines for Iowa Community Colleges* guide and in the *State Accreditation Guide* on the Department website. Community colleges are required to review at least 20 percent of their CTE programs annually, standards for which are provided in the aforementioned program approval guidelines. The Department team reviewed NICC's CTE program review process, schedule and a random sample of recent CTE program reviews to ensure compliance with the CTE program review standards. For the standards regarding program advisory committees' composition, roles and responsibilities, the Department team reviewed a random sample of CTE advisory committee membership lists and meeting minutes to ensure compliance.

Based on the program review documents submitted for the desk review, NICC follows a five-year cycle for its comprehensive program review. Program review analyzes outcomes, highlights the growth of the program and provides the foundation for program planning to ensure its future success. Incorporated within the program review cycle is the Annual Key Performance Indicator Review (AKPIR), which is the yearly review of a program's key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure a program is sustainable and responding to dynamic workforce needs. Program review documentation is reviewed by the Program Evaluation Team, a district-wide team that is composed of faculty and staff and has cross-representation from the college. During the program review process, program faculty present a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the program and the subsequent action plan to the Program Evaluation Team.

The Department team was impressed with the additional following practices related to program review at NICC:

- Program review documentation is clear and comprehensive and outlines the timelines, roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Mentors work with new faculty to help them learn the program review process.
- Components of the assessment of student learning, such as program goals/objectives, graduate job placement and success in the workforce are integrated into program review.
- Co-curricular experiences are incorporated into program curriculum maps.
- Program review documentation asks program faculty how noncredit certificates and courses, and industry standard certifications and licensures, ladder into programs.
- The college has been working towards incorporating Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) and work-based learning (WBL) into programs and curriculum.
- The use of a template for advisory committee meetings has resulted in robust conversations during meetings. Additionally, the college has very thorough advisory committee membership lists and membership is analyzed during the program review process.

- NICC has been using open educational resources (OER) to keep costs down for students.

Iowa Code 258.4(7), Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 46.6(4) and Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 24.5(4) state that CTE programs should meet the educational needs of students and the employment community including students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulations (i.e., students with disabilities, male and female students and students from diverse racial and ethnic groups) and that program review processes assess how programs provide these same students with support services and remove access barriers to education and employment. Thus, it is **strongly recommended** that NICC disaggregate data during program review and use that data to identify barriers and strategies for closing achievement gaps.

At the last accreditation visit, there was a recommendation to connect the program review action steps with the annual AKPIR action steps. During program review, NICC ranks program indicators as “Satisfactory”, “Strong” or “Needs Improvement” and only asks programs with “Needs Improvement” ratings to annually reflect on action step progress. The Department team **strongly recommends** connecting these goal setting processes so that all programs reflect annually on action step progress, not just programs with low ratings. To continue improving the program review process, the Department accreditation team also **recommends** formally linking action steps to the strategic plan and budgeting processes, more thoroughly analyzing how program costs are proportionate to educational benefits received and ensuring that the most current program review template is being used consistently across campus.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

STICS Curriculum Review

The Department utilizes the State of Iowa Curriculum System (STICS) web-based platform for its program approval process, and maintains a database of approved programs and courses. STICS performs compliance checks on all programs offered by each college. The Department program quality consultant conducted a compliance check of NICC’s programs to ensure they meet state standards. Additionally, the consultant manually compared NICC’s approved academic programs in the state’s database with those provided in the college catalog.

Overall, minimal edits were needed to align the college catalog with STICS. There were no instances of programs being out of compliance in regards to technical core, general education or credit hour requirements. The Department team was impressed with how NICC corrected many of the curriculum discrepancies prior to the accreditation visit. The college has continued to work on these edits and the team anticipates completion in a timely manner.

It was apparent from the interviews that NICC has sound curriculum practices. After deans meet with faculty members and advisory committees, they submit curriculum changes via the college’s approval process, which also involves faculty members. The college uses Acalog for the catalog and Curriculog for approving internal curriculum. Additionally, the Director of Registration and Retention ensures compliance during the approval process. Once the changes are approved by the curriculum committee, which includes representation from both arts and sciences and the two main campuses, the new program or program changes are submitted to the state for approval. With Acalog and Curriculog being owned by the same company, there is “communication” from Curriculog to Acalog so that any curriculum changes are reflected in the catalog. The department team was impressed with the thoroughness of NICC’s catalog pages for each program, how program outcomes were listed in the catalog and how there are opportunities for students to earn credentials along pathways.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Strategic Plan

Community colleges are required to update their strategic plans at least every five years as a guide for the community and its decision-making (Iowa Code section 256.31(4)(a)). The Department team reviewed NICC's most recent strategic plan and interviewed selected staff to ensure compliance with this standard.

NICC utilizes a three-year strategic planning cycle, demonstrated by their 2023-2025 plan. The current strategic plan, which is focused on NICC's vision, mission and values, consists of four strategic priorities: *Our People, Our Consumer, Our Organization* and *Our Finances*. The college tracks the strategic priorities and updates subsequent goals, with updates presented to the Board of Trustees quarterly. The 2019-2022 strategic plan had substantial stakeholder input; however, the current strategic plan did not due to the college hiring a new president at that time. Additionally, the 2023-2025 strategic plan was not initially approved by the Board of Trustees. It was eventually approved in January 2024.

The Department team was impressed with how the college tracks strategic priorities, goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). Additionally, NICC plans on being more intentional about which KPIs and goals to measure, that the KPIs are measured consistently and uniformly and that the college is being transparent about the achievement of KPIs. The strategic plan website that NICC is working to develop is a good practice and a positive step toward stronger communication at the college. The team was also impressed with how the institutional values presented in the strategic plan are connected to the interview and evaluation process for new faculty and staff.

Faculty members stated that they did not have much opportunity for input in the development of the strategic plan. It is **recommended** that the college expand the number of internal and external constituents consulted during the strategic planning process. Although it appears that some departments have their own strategic plan, it is recommended that the college formalize the development of unit-level plans that connect to the institutional plan so that all faculty and staff can see how their work connects.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Physical Plant and Facilities

Each community college must present evidence of adequate planning to the Department accreditation team, including a board-approved facilities plan. The community college's plan must meet state and federal requirements as outlined in the state accreditation guide. The Department team reviewed NICC's most recent facilities plan, approved by the board in October 2019, and interviewed the executive director of facilities and operations, executive director for risk management and title IX, ADA/504 and equity coordinator, executive director of computer information systems, director of accessibility services, accessibility services coordinator and other personnel regarding the college's facility planning process and decision-making structure to ensure compliance with this standard.

The Department team was impressed with NICC's facilities, which have centralized student services and are mindful of community needs. The most recent version of NICC's master facilities plan is comprehensive and contains numerous maps and photos. The facilities plan is updated at a minimum every five years and is annually presented to the Board of Trustees every April or May for projects that need to be completed that year. Special projects are brought before the board as they arise. The college also initiated a comprehensive street improvement project in 2022. ADA compliance issues are addressed as they occur. The college also ensures ADA compliance during all renovations and partners with an insurance company to perform ADA audits.

The college's commitment to safety and security were particularly impressive, as evidenced by their very comprehensive Safety and Security Plan. Students reported feeling safe on campus, with a security presence on both the Peosta and Calmar campuses. The campus safety and security team meets monthly, and during those

meetings they plan required drills and identify major issues. Cameras are located throughout facilities district-wide and the college utilizes a system that allows doors to be locked remotely. The Peosta campus is working on a partnership with Dubuque county to provide new training that would allow EMS personnel to enter a “warm zone” that hasn’t been completely cleared (i.e., in a shooting incident).

The Department team was very impressed with the technological advancements made on campus. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, NICC installed internet in the parking lots so that students had access to Wi-Fi and have decided to keep this technology for students. Computers that age out of the system (i.e., faculty laptops) are made available to students based on need. In regards to cybersecurity, NICC hired an information security officer several years ago to monitor all information security, screen for active threats and coordinate long-term planning. The college uses two-factor authentication and staff are required to complete cybersecurity training twice a year.

Overall, the Department team was impressed with the conditions of the facilities, the thorough planning around facilities improvements and safety initiatives. The team **recommends** that the student handbook contains a direct link to the campus safety report. It is also **recommended** that the college develop more ways for faculty and students to engage with facilities and technology planning on the front end before facilities changes occur so that the voice of the end user is heard.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Quality Faculty Plans

Iowa law establishes the process for community colleges to plan for faculty hiring and professional development. Institutional Quality Faculty Plans (QFPs) must meet the standards of Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 24.5(5). The Department team reviewed NICC’s QFP and interviewed members of the college’s QFP Committee, to ensure compliance with this standard. The Department team also reviewed QFP hours for the random sample of 20 faculty members for whom the college provided documentation.

NICC’s QFP was approved by the college’s board of trustees on July 17, 2023. Appendices to the plan are reviewed annually by the committee and the plan is reviewed by the board of trustees when changes are necessary. The plan is maintained by an 18 member QFP committee consisting of 12 faculty members (with equal representation of arts and science and CTE faculty), four administrators and two other staff members that meet to review and revise the plan as needed. The Department team met with the committee to discuss key components of their QFP to ascertain that it meets compliance requirements. The committee typically meets twice a year with additional subcommittee meetings. Six continuing education units (CEUs) are required every five years by all faculty, including adjunct faculty and concurrent enrollment faculty. CEU offerings are broad and attempt to keep up with technology changes (i.e., how to approach the use of ChatGPT by students). The plan has eight competencies and faculty members are responsible for submitting documentation to substantiate continuous development activities. This documentation is then forwarded to human resources for inclusion in the faculty development file and approved professional development activities are tracked and archived in the CEU Tracking Hub of the Learning Management System (LMS).

The Department team was impressed with the following aspects of NICC’s QFP process:

- The QFP committee has good size and representation and is using faculty onboarding, professional development and compliance subcommittees to help move forward the work of the committee. It was clear that updates from the statewide Faculty Advisory Committee are also presented during meetings.
- NICC has an extensive, intentional faculty onboarding process that consists of courses that include traditional onboarding, a new teacher workshop and also courses that train faculty on teaching methods, faculty leadership and online course development in the LMS.

- The tracking of professional development moved to an electronic process in 2021. At the last visit, professional continuing education units (CEUs) were not tied to competencies, but now faculty, including concurrent enrollment faculty, have the ability to align professional development activities with competencies in the LMS.
- The QFP includes a formal mentoring program where new faculty are assigned to a faculty mentor, who is trained and paid a stipend, for a two-year period. Faculty are also connected to the Department of Innovation and Design (DID) team, which is composed of instructor designers that help faculty members with instructional course quality.
- Faculty have the opportunity to learn and engage in effective pedagogical practices during the open “common” hour built into the course schedule.

To further improve the QFP process, the Department team has the following **recommendations**:

- Formalize a process where faculty discuss their QFP goals and professional development ideas with their supervisor during individual review meetings to get feedback on their QFP plan. Include alignment of the plan with department and/or institutional priorities during these discussions.
- Align instructional competencies with institutional priorities and the strategic plan.
- Clarify how full-time faculty, part-time faculty, adjunct faculty and concurrent enrollment faculty are part of the plan and outline the various requirements of each group.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Senior Year Plus Programs

There are a variety of requirements for Senior Year Plus (SYP) programs offered to high school students jointly enrolled in Iowa’s community colleges. These requirements are included in Iowa Code section 261E. Currently, the Department utilizes the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) accreditation process to ensure compliance with many statutory requirements (as required by the legislated Postsecondary Course Audit Committee, which is charged with reviewing samples of postsecondary courses delivered through SYP programs). The Department team reviewed NICC’s accreditation status with NACEP, interviewed selected staff and reviewed documentation to ensure compliance with this standard.

NICC’s concurrent enrollment program has maintained NACEP accreditation, and is approved through AY 25-26. The program is overseen by the Dean of High School Partnerships. It serves 21 Iowa school districts, and provides programming in various modalities, including at the high schools, through career academies and online. Each year, the SYP program at NICC serves 3,000 students, and has 138 faculty members teaching concurrent enrollment courses. NICC’s program appears to operate well. Program staff coordinate and monitor programming within the NICC service area. This work ensures continuity of SYP program processes and procedures, and includes the use of faculty liaisons to make certain the rigor of programming offered within the area high schools is the same as that of courses taught on the college campus.

Overall, the Department saw substantial evidence in the college’s course prerequisites and admissions policies, add/drop policies, grading policies and course accommodations demonstrating that the college does not place undue restrictions on concurrent enrollment students. Student support services are available to all concurrent enrollment students, such as access to the learning center, online counseling and advising services. The team was particularly impressed with the following elements of NICC’s concurrent enrollment program:

- There are multiple ways NICC ensures consistency between courses taught in the high school, and those taught at the college campus. For example, the college uses Simple Syllabus software that is embedded in the learning management system (LMS). The college uses master course guides to use as a curricular blueprint that covers course goals, learning objectives/outcomes, the general education emphasis,

instructional methods and related principles/procedures that must be incorporated into all sections of the course. Additionally, common assessments are incorporated into the LMS.

- NICC has a robust concurrent enrollment faculty onboarding process that includes multiple orientations and requires the completion of professional development coursework (FAC101 and FAC102 and possibly FAC103 and FAC104 depending on teaching experience).
- The college provides thorough resources, such as the High School Partnerships Resource Packet, to concurrent enrollment students. The Guided Career Pathways document is a great resource for students, showing how concurrent enrollment coursework fits into overall community college programs.
- The college has very strong relationships with district leadership and staff. Staff from NICC attend monthly superintendent, principal, counselor and regional planning partnership (RPP) meetings.
- NICC utilizes College and Career Coaches to work directly with high school students to help them determine their career, education and life goals after they graduate high school.

Although NICC has a sound concurrent enrollment program, the Department team **recommends** that the college review and clarify some of the language in the concurrent enrollment documentation. Department staff will work with NICC on specific details regarding documentation clean-up. The team also **recommends** that NICC extend the great efforts they are currently doing with CTE concurrent enrollment courses to arts and sciences courses in regards to recruiting diverse students.

The Department team noted that the High School Partnerships Concurrent Enrollment application form requires students to release educational records to the student's parent and/or legal guardian. The team **strongly recommends** that the college revise its application form to make it clear that the student signature is simply requested (i.e., voluntary with the student's approval) and not required (as it is currently outlined) with regard to consent to release educational records to parents under Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Due to the unique nature of the concurrent enrollment program, the institution may consider consulting legal counsel to ensure practices and policies related to student rights under FERPA are in line with federal requirements. It is also **recommended** that NICC develop a parent handbook to clarify policies regarding the sharing of educational records.

Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 22.4(1) states that institutions shall not place restrictions on participation in Senior Year Plus programming beyond that which is specified in statute or administrative rule. This means that concurrent enrollment students should not be charged for textbooks unless it aligns with their district textbook policy. It was not clear from NICC's documentation as to whether textbooks are free for concurrent enrollment students. Therefore, it is **strongly recommended** that NICC clarify in the documentation provided to students and instructors that students should not be required to pay for textbooks.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Compliance with Non-Accreditation State or Federal Requirements

During the Department's accreditation review of NICC, the Department received a complaint related to House File 802 and Iowa Code section 261H, which prohibit discrimination based on political ideology, prohibit required training on specific divisive concepts related to diversity, equity and inclusion and require that colleges promote a culture of free speech and expression on campus. In response to this complaint, the Department team expanded the scope of its desk review and onsite visit to investigate concerns raised.

The review team investigated three items relating to HF 802 and Iowa Code section 261H. First, whether or not the college was requiring training in violation of the divisive concepts listed in HF 802. Next, the extent to which the college prohibits the discrimination of individuals based on political ideology. Finally, the mechanisms employed at the college to promote free speech and expression on campus.

The Department team found that NICC does have required faculty and staff trainings, many of which are required for compliance with state and federal law. The particular training mentioned in the complaint as being in possible violation of HF 802 was a mandatory training utilizing content and curriculum from the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE). NICC did not meet its Perkins Performance target in 2022 for non-traditional student enrollment in CTE programs and had to develop a corrective action plan. The NAPE training was brought to the college as a part of this corrective action plan, and to help faculty learn how to ensure the success of all students within CTE programs. This training was discontinued by the college shortly after HF 802 went into effect, and the training is no longer offered at the college. The team **recommends** that NICC continue to use faculty training as a mechanism for improving faculty understanding of best practices in serving the needs of “nontraditional” student populations, particularly those in underrepresented CTE programs, and **recommends** that college staff continue to monitor any required training to ensure that no required trainings contain divisive concepts outlined in HF 802.

HF 802 also prohibits discrimination of staff, faculty and students on the basis of political ideology. In discussions with staff, faculty and students, there was no concern expressed about discrimination based on political ideology on campus. To help ensure students, faculty and staff are not discriminated against based on political ideology, the Department review team **recommends** that NICC adapt the college’s Freedom of Speech and Expression Policy to include language stating that “employees are prohibited from discriminating against students and employees based on political ideology”.

Finally, the Department team found that NICC offers the required annual training on freedom of speech, satisfying requirements of Iowa Code section 261H. The Department team **recommends** that NICC administration continue to offer this training on an annual basis and to actively encourage participation among staff, faculty and students.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Evaluation Team Recommendation

The Department's community college accreditation team recommends continued accreditation for Northeast Iowa Community College.

A state comprehensive accreditation evaluation is scheduled for FY29 (i.e., AY 28-29).