Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

July 16, 2025

Agenda Item: Area Education Agency (AEA) Accreditation Report – Mississippi Bend

State Board Goal: Goal 2

State Board Role/Authority: Iowa Code 273.10 and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281 – 72 requires the Iowa Department of Education to conduct an AEA accreditation process for AEA and for the State Board to determine whether a program of an AEA shall receive initial accreditation or shall remain accredited.

Presenter(s):   Shane Williams, Chief Administrator
Mississippi Bend AEA

Kim Hofmann, Director of District Supports
Mississippi Bend AEA

Attachment(s):   Two

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board of Education grant continued accreditation to Mississippi Bend AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed.

Mississippi Bend AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in its budget reviewed for approval by the State Board of Education in March 2026.

Background: On March 27, 2024, HF2612 was enacted, which modified the current accreditation standards to add and focus on learners with disabilities, add standards for special education compliance and learning environment, and add instructional practice requirements for media

and technology. The Department of Education piloted an accreditation process this year using the updated and expanded set of statutory accreditation standards applicable for each AEA. The process resulted in a report identifying AEA required actions, recommended actions for continuous improvement and strengths upon which to build for each standard area.

Mississippi Bend AEA Accreditation Report Summary

Agency Mission and Goals

The Mission of the Mississippi Bend AEA is to improve teaching and learning for all students through active partnerships and assertive leadership in a climate of mutual respect.

- Increase the percentage of low socioeconomic, individualized education programs, and minority students achieving reading proficiency in grades 3-8, and 11.
- Increase the percentage of low socioeconomic, individualized education programs, and minority students achieving math proficiency in grades 3-8, and 11.
- Increase the percentage of low socioeconomic, individualized education programs, and minority students achieving science proficiency in grades 5, 8, and 11.

Service Area Data

- 21 public school districts
- 20 accredited nonpublic schools
- 47,530 PK-12 students
- 273 total AEA staff
- Covers 2,440 square miles

- 4 IDEA-DA Level 3 districts
- 9 IDEA-DA Level 2 districts
- 2 ESSA CSI
- 23 ESSA TSI
- Center of Excellence: Leadership for Closing the Achievement Gap

Required Improvement Actions

Professional Development
- Provide required IDEA-DA professional learning and practice coaching to all Level 2 and Level 3 districts.
- Identify staff to receive professional learning on the SDI practice-based coaching model and system-based coaching model and clarify coaching expectations for staff.

Special Education Services and Support
- Provide professional learning and coaching for AEA staff to address current inappropriate early childhood evaluation and screening processes.

Recommended Continuous Improvement Actions

School-Community Planning
- Clarify placement options for preschool learners who become eligible for special education.

Professional Development
- Develop a more robust internal professional learning plan for AEA staff.
- Identify AEA staff that need to participate in IDEA-DA SDI professional learning to build capacity.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- There are no recommended continuous improvement actions that Mississippi Bend AEA should implement in the 2025-26 school year in this standard.

Special Education Services and Support
- Partner with districts to review special education identification rates, conduct a root cause analysis, and develop action plans to ensure timely and accurate identification practices for special education.
- Review professional learning plans for AEA and LEA staff, prioritizing learning for staff serving infants, toddlers and preschool learners in special education.

Technology Planning Services
- Develop an awareness of Accessible Educational Materials, when it should be selected on the IEP, and a referral and response process like the one used for Assistive Technology.
- Provide professional learning for Early ACCESS providers on how to document Assistive Technology on the IFSP.

Learning Environment
- There are no recommended continuous improvement actions that Mississippi Bend AEA should implement in the 2025-26 school year in this standard.

Compliance
- There are no recommended continuous improvement actions that Mississippi Bend AEA should implement in the 2025-26 school year in this standard.

Program Evaluation
- Support all districts through program evaluation across all standards, not just special education.
- Edit the current continuous improvement plan to be more agency-specific and ensure AEA staff understand the plan.

Management Services
- Provide a list of managed services available to districts, define a request process, and articulate that process to districts prior to districts needing the services.

Media Services
- Gather quantitative data on media usage and impact on student learning outcomes and formalize the process for media program evaluation within the agency and with districts in order to enhance the media services plan and enhance service delivery to districts.

Strengths

School-Community Planning
- Partnerships to meet postsecondary transition services and support linkages and access to community services.
- Strong relationships and collaboration to align AEA services with school needs.

Professional Development
- Well-designed professional learning plans for external audiences across content areas.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Implementation of the Leading for Impact literacy achievement pilot.
- District Service Administrators are embedded into all aspects of curriculum, instruction and assessment with districts.
- Media services enhance and provide support with curriculum and instruction.

Special Education Services and Support
- Growth for learners in Early ACCESS over the last three years in the areas of social emotional skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and using appropriate behaviors.
- Services provided at the partnership school consortium program.

Technology Planning Services
- Well-designed Assistive Technology referral and response process.

Learning Environment
- MTSS implementation for behavior and access to challenging behavior and autism supports.
- Services provided at the partnership school consortium program.

Compliance
- The AEA submitted all required reports on time.
- The AEA special education administrator has a data review process established to implement general supervision.

Program Evaluation
- Use of qualitative and quantitative data to analyze agency program and service delivery.
- Special education program evaluation the AEA offers to districts.

Management Services
- The AEA Home School Assistance Program manages all aspects of home-schooling for eight districts.
- The agency provides services to districts that extend the continuum of mental health programming.

Media Services
- Provision of a robust collection of digital and print materials.
- Services provided at the partnership school consortium program.

Department Accreditation Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board of Education grant continued accreditation to Mississippi Bend AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed.

Mississippi Bend AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in its budget reviewed for approval by the State Board of Education in March 2026.

**Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency
2025 Accreditation Report**

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Contents

Purpose

Iowa Code 273.10 defines the purpose of this report as determining if standards have been met and making a recommendation to the Iowa State Board of Education (State Board) as to whether the programs of the area education agency (AEA) should receive initial accreditation or remain accredited.

This recommendation is based on a program audit review of documents, a clarification call with the AEA team, an on-site visit and a final verification process.

Mississippi Bend AEA Service Area Data

Mississippi Bend AEA encompasses

- 21 public school districts
- 20 accredited nonpublic schools
- 47,530 students, preschool through grade 12
- 273 total AEA staff members
- Covers 2,440 square miles
- 4 IDEA-DA Level 3 districts
- 9 IDEA-DA Level 2 districts
- 2 ESSA CSI
- 23 ESSA TSI
- Center of Excellence: Leadership for Closing the Achievement Gap for Learners with Disabilities

AEA Accreditation Process

Iowa Code 273.10 and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-72 requires the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to conduct an AEA accreditation process to determine if the AEA is meeting accreditation standards. Accreditation standards for the AEA were revised during the 2024 legislative session, with the new standards taking effect July 1, 2025. Therefore, the Department developed and piloted a new AEA accreditation process during the 2024-25 academic year that encompassed the existing standards that were expanded to include learners with disabilities and the new standards that were added to the expectations. The accreditation process used during the 2024-25 year included a program audit which is a review of Department collected and AEA provided data. It also included a clarification call with the AEA team, an on-site visit, and a final verification process.

For the purposes of the AEA accreditation pilot, similar standards were grouped together and reviewed collectively as a whole. The standards will become a part of Iowa Code after they become effective and the Iowa Administrative Code is updated.

Standards were grouped together as follows:

- School – Community Planning
    - o Standard a – Support for school-community planning, including a means of assessing needs, developing collaborative relationships among community agencies, establishing shared direction, and implementing program plans and reporting progress toward goals for all students, including students with disabilities.
- Professional Development
    - o Standard b - Evidence-based professional development programs that respond to current needs.
    - o Standard q - Support for staff development and adult learners utilizing evidence-based professional development in a manner that meets the professional needs of staff and adult learners consistent with standards adopted by the state board of education.

- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
  - Standard c - Support for curriculum development, instruction, and assessment services that address the areas of reading, language arts, math, and science, using research-based methodologies, for all students, including students with disabilities.
  - Standard p - Support for students using educational programs and services in a manner that is consistent with the educational standards established pursuant to section 256.11.
- Special Education Services and Support
  - Standard d - Special education support.
  - Standard j - Support for early childhood service coordination for families and children, age birth through three years, to meet health, safety, and learning needs, including service coordination.
  - Standard m - Support for addressing the diverse learning needs of all children and youths, including children and youths who are eligible for special education through services that include direct services to students with disabilities.
- Technology Planning and Services
  - Standard g - Support for school technology planning and staff development for implementing instructional technologies.
  - Standard o - Support necessary to implement effective instruction for all students, including students with disabilities, through school technology services.
- Learning Environment
  - Standard l - Support for schools and school districts in analyzing student achievement data related to the learning environment, comparing data to the external knowledge base, and using that information to guide schools and school districts in setting goals and implementing actions to improve student learning for all students, including students with disabilities.
- Compliance
  - Standard k - Timely submission of required reports and documents to the state board of education, the department of education, and the division of special education of the department of education.
  - Standard n - Support for schools and school districts to ensure compliance with rules adopted by the state board of education related to special education.
  - Standard r - Compliance with all relevant federal and state laws in the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities.
- Program Evaluation
  - Standard h - A program and services evaluation and reporting system that includes information related to special education.
- Management Services
  - Standard e – Management services, including financial reporting and purchasing as requested and funded by local districts.
- Media Services
  - Standard f – support for instructional media services that supplement and support local district media centers and services.
  - Standard l – Support for school district libraries in accordance with section 273.2, subsection 4.

AEA Accreditation Standards and Results

The on-site visit at Mississippi Bend AEA included several interviews, a presentation by the Chief Administrator and Director of District Supports and an observation at a behavior specialty program. The following are the results for each standard area reviewed during the accreditation process.

School-Community Planning

This section includes how the AEA provides support for school-community planning, including a means of assessing needs, establishing shared direction, and implementing program plans and reporting progress toward goals for all students, including students with disabilities.

Strengths

Schools, Partnership School staff, and the Secondary Transition Specialists reported partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services, Iowa Work Force Development, Community Colleges and Mental Health regions in the area to meet postsecondary transition services for students and support linkages and access to community services. Examples provided by these groups included on-site scheduled and frequent VR and Iowa Work Force services delivered at the partnership school; exploratory and credit opportunities with community colleges; and co-located mental health telehealth services provided for students.

District leadership and AEA district support administrators (DSAs) reported strong relationships and collaboration activities prior to and throughout the school year to align AEA services with school needs. Examples included: DSAs gathering input from district leadership prior of the start of the school year to inform resource allocation; DSAs communicating staff resource allocation and AEA assignments with school leaders; scheduled monthly DSA and AEA staff meetings with district leadership to monitor implementation and to adjust AEA support as needed.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

In reviewing the Early ACCESS - Early Head Start Collaboration and Partnership document and IEP data, the IEP data shows that few learners are attending at Head Start or Shared Visions Preschool locations. Interviewees reported that often if a learner became eligible for special education, the services were provided at the district program. While transportation may be provided between the district and the community partner, it was reported that having the special education services provided at the community partner was not an option discussed by IEP teams. It is recommended that clarification be provided to AEA and LEA staff on the placement options for preschool learners, including the consideration of the learner's current program as a potential location for receiving special education services.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standard is met.

Professional Development

This section provides evidence that explains how evidence-based professional development programs offered by the AEA respond to current needs and are consistent with the standards adopted by the State Board.

Strengths

A review of the permanent products submitted by the AEA indicated well designed professional learning plans for external audiences across content areas. Interviewees indicated that Mississippi Bend AEA regularly used data and district or building designations to identify professional learning needs. In addition, the professional learning plans that were submitted for the program audit also included the data used to inform the need, smart goals, scope and sequence of learning, and identification of expected outcomes. Interviewees reported learning plans that were well-designed and based upon a theory of change intended to lead to teacher behavior change and improve student achievement. Lastly, interviews and professional learning submitted to the Department for approval

contain evidence-based practices in the content areas as well as packages to support districts and schools with implementation and monitoring support.

Required Actions

Mississippi Bend AEA is required to provide IDEA-Differentiated Accountability (IDEA-DA) professional learning and practice coaching for Level 2 and Level 3 designated districts. Interviewees reported that some districts started IDEA-DA specially designed instruction (SDI) professional learning later than expected. Interviewees also reported that they have not consistently received practice coaching, provided practice coaching, and do not completely understand the role of a practice coach. The AEA is required to provide SDI professional learning and practice coaching to all Level 2 and Level 3 districts as mandated by the Department in a timely manner at the start of the 2025-26 year and to show evidence of completion to the Department in the next accreditation cycle.

Interview groups reported that AEA staff have not consistently participated in the IDEA-DA SDI professional learning packages with districts. They also reported that they have not participated in professional learning to support SDI practice coaching and that there is not a clear understanding of the definitions of and differences between a system coach and a practice coach in the IDEA-DA model. The AEA is required to develop an internal professional learning plan for IDEA-DA. The plan should include professional learning provided to all staff that includes an overview of IDEA-DA and the SDI Framework to build awareness. The agency must identifying the AEA staff members that need to participate in each of the SDI content strand professional learning packages in order to build content knowledge, understanding and capacity for practice coaching in the AEA.

Furthermore, the internal professional learning plan must address practice coaching. AEA staff should receive professional learning on a "practice-based coaching model" which focuses on directly observing and providing feedback on teachers' specific work practices within their role as well as a "system-based coaching model" which looks at the broader organizational systems and processes that impact an individual's performance, aiming to improve the overall system to benefit everyone involved with both general and special education staff. Agency administration need to clearly identify AEA staff expected to provide IDEA-DA practice coaching and the expected frequency for coaching Level 2 and Level 3 districts (monthly for Level 2 and twice a month for Level 3 districts). Lastly, staff should be held accountable for implementation of the required expectations.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

The program audit review indicated and interviewees reported that the internal professional development plan was not as robust as the professional development plans identified and developed for external audiences. It was also noted that internal professional development was not provided with the same frequency or alignment to needs as reported and documented for professional development and coaching support provided to school staff; which was described as a strength above. An example of this is the lack of professional development for AEA staff conducting Child Find activities for preschool-age learners. Therefore, it is recommended that the agency develop a more robust internal professional learning plan based upon needs assessment data that mirrors the plans developed for external districts.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are met.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

This section provides evidence of how the AEA supports curriculum development, instruction and assessment for reading, language arts, mathematics, and science using research-based methodologies for all students, including students with disabilities.

Strengths

The Leading for Impact literacy achievement pilot follows the continuous improvement model and is a strength in the AEA. The model includes the use of several evidence-based practices like the Science of Reading, the use of high-quality instructional materials, access to high quality core instruction and the use of high leverage practices in special education. In addition, the model includes a focus on the Core 4 leadership behaviors of 1) understanding the rationale for change, 2) knowledge and understanding, 3) structured collaboration, and 4) reflection plus one more – accountability. The Leading for Impact pilot includes professional learning for leaders and teachers, implementation support, on-going coaching, a focus on collaboration, implementation of quality core instruction with access and scaffolding of instruction as needed, intensification of instruction, and walk throughs and observations in classrooms to support implementation. The AEA presentation and interviewee groups reported initial positive results. There has been an increase in fidelity of implementation of quality instruction, a high level of buy-in from staff and leaders, and they are seeing students make expected growth on FAST benchmarks. As the AEA continues to evaluate the impact of the pilot implementation throughout the year and looks at year-end evaluation, this is a model that could potentially be scaled up for state-wide implementation to impact student learning outcomes.

Another strength at this AEA is that DSA are embedded into all areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment with districts. The DSAs provide support for analyzing data and continue to provide assistance throughout the planning and implementation process with schools.

Media services enhance and provide support with curriculum and instruction. There is evidence of support for districts in curriculum adoption, professional learning related to materials to enhance accessibility, and assistance with professional learning and methods to engage learners.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

It is recommended that Mississippi Bend AEA complete the year-end evaluation process of the Leading for Impact literacy pilot project. Assuming the results continue to be positive as expected, it is recommended that the agency discuss ways that the pilot might continue in the new landscape of AEA service delivery. The AEA may want to consider a more robust evaluation plan to determine the impact of implementation on teachers and administrators as well as the change in student outcomes. The AEA may also want to consider expanding the literacy coaching model to additional sites within Mississippi Bend AEA to impact a larger number of learners if positive outcomes are experienced at the end of this year or consider how the coaching model might be used in other content areas.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are met.

Special Education Services and Support

This section provides evidence of support for special education services, early childhood services for families and children and support for addressing the diverse learning needs of all children and youth.

Strengths

A review of the Early ACCESS Early Childhood Outcomes noted growth for learners in Early ACCESS over the last three years in the areas of social emotional skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and use of appropriate behaviors. It is a strength that the Early ACCESS services provided by Mississippi Bend AEA staff are contributing to or correlated with positive student outcomes for learners birth to age three.

In addition, the AEA supports a partnership school consortium program in partnership with a number of districts. On-site observations of the program and interviews related to the partnership school consortium program revealed that the program provides services to a wide range of learners with IEPs and it serves to expand the continuum of services available locally to districts. This program has been operating for nine years and recently moved to a new building. The consortium program is seen as a positive resource for districts in the AEA. In a time when districts struggle to find appropriate placement options to provide a FAPE for learners, this is a valuable resource for districts in the area.

Required Actions

Interviewees reported a prescribed preschool early childhood evaluation and screening process. The Child Find process should be individualized based upon each learner's unique circumstances and not a standardized, prescribed process. Mississippi Bend AEA is required to provide professional learning with additional follow-up coaching to support fidelity of implementation to AEA staff to change this practice. Preschool Child Find professional learning must occur by November 14, 2025, to ensure Child Find practices are individualized to the child.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

District staff reported variation in how the AEA is supporting districts to address identification rates. Evidence included examples of both strengths in districts working to address identification rate concerns in strong partnership with the AEA and concerns in districts where addressing identification rates is not being prioritized by the AEA. It is recommended that the AEA consistently partner with districts to review identification rates for special education eligibility, work in partnership to conduct root cause analysis, and develop and implement action plans to ensure timely and accurate identification practices for special education.

Based upon AEA staff interviews, review of professional learning materials and professional learning plans for AEA and LEA staff, it is recommended that the Mississippi Bend AEA Special Education Leadership prioritize the implementation of the professional development plans for ongoing learning and support for staff serving infants, toddlers and preschool learners in the following topical areas:

1. Using a variety of methods and tools to gather sufficient and relevant information about preschool-aged children's (3-5) development when AEA staff are determining whether there may be reason(s) to suspect a disability and ensure staff understand suspicion is not intended to be a challenging threshold to clear.
2. Conducting individualized, comprehensive evaluations for infants, toddlers and preschool learners involves gathering relevant functional, developmental and academic information within the context of appropriate activities, designing and implementing interventions aligned to the Iowa Early Learning Standards, and determining the need for services to meet the unique needs of learners.
3. Understanding of the Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) Framework for Preschool children; the critical components needed to support learners; and a positive trajectory of learners' achievement, functioning and progress as a result of SDI implementation.
4. Understanding the integration of learners' present levels of performance and functional abilities as components of the initial evaluation/assessment and IFSP and IEPs.
5. Supporting consistency in the implementation of Early ACCESS transition planning, including steps and services for families and children, to ensure a smooth transition to special education or to other community services and/or programs.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are met.

Technology Planning and Services

This section provides evidence of support for school technology planning, staff development for implementing instructional technologies and support for implementing effective instruction through the use of technology, including for students with disabilities.

Strengths

The review of permanent products indicated a well-designed Assistive Technology (AT) referral and response process. District staff reported satisfaction with the AT services provided by Mississippi Bend AEA related service providers in the development and implementation of IEPs.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

There is a distinguishing gap between the 4th grade learners with disabilities and above with reading goals and those with Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) on the IEP. Only about one fourth of the 4th graders with reading goals have AEM on the IEP. In contrast to the AT services described above as a strength, AEA and district staff did not report use of AEM. It is recommended that the AEA review the practices that have made AT for learners with IEPs such a strength at the agency and develop a similar process as well as strategies to increase awareness of AEM and the consideration and use of AEM.

According to data from the ACHIEVE report, there are no IFSPs with AT services or AT devices. Interviewees reported not having a place in the IFSP to document AT. It is recommended that Early ACCESS providers receive professional development related to the use and documentation of AT services and supports within an IFSP.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are met.

Learning Environment

This section provides evidence of support for districts in analyzing data related to the learning environment and in guiding districts in continuous improvement efforts towards improving the learning environment and social-emotional-behavioral outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

Strengths

From interviews, participants reported consistent themes around Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) implementation for behavior and access to challenging behavior and autism supports. The districts view the AEA as a supportive resource. The agency has made a concerted effort to provide information to district leaders about discipline and responses to behavioral issues. The partnership school consortium program was also reported to be a valuable resource to districts in extending the continuum of services and supports available for learners with challenges.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

It is recommended that the AEA continue to provide the high-quality level of MTSS implementation support for behavior as well as challenging behavior and autism supports for districts. It is clear that these services are highly valued and maintenance of these services are needed to support districts and students.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standard is met.

Compliance

This section provides evidence of timely submission of required reports and documents, compliance with relevant federal and state laws in special education and support for schools to ensure compliance with rules related to special education.

Strengths

The AEA submitted all required reports in a timely manner. The agency also provides a special education network and information to districts to ensure compliance with rules and procedures related to special education. The current AEA special education leader has special education data review processes and procedures in place to ensure compliance and has established procedures to implement general supervision in the AEA and LEA.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

It is recommended that the AEA maintain the current procedures and practices in order to continue to meet general supervision expectations, to review agency special education data, and to meet expected compliance and reporting timelines.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are met.

Program Evaluation

This section provides evidence of a program and services evaluation and reporting system that includes information related to special education.

Strengths

Interviews and document review indicate the agency utilizes qualitative feedback and district delivery plans as a means to analyze program and service delivery. During interviews it was stated the agency utilizes universal screening data, ISASP, postsecondary readiness data and special education data to determine goals and action steps in developing the agency's continuous improvement plan and annual progress report.

Mississippi Bend AEA has developed a special education program review process to assess and enhance the quality of services provided to students with disabilities. The process is systematic and data-driven, involving multiple components to help districts ensure compliance, effectiveness, and continuous improvement. The evaluation process typically includes focus groups/surveys, walk through observations, a data review, a data summary/compilation of the data, and a time for the AEA to share recommendations with the district. The program audit provided evidence that this process has been completed with multiple districts in the AEA.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

There was evidence of program evaluation as shown in the permanent product review through the Special Education Program Review Process Description and district specific examples. District staff reported satisfaction with program evaluation and support to use it in action planning and multi-year

implementation efforts. It is recommended the AEA review and document efforts to support all districts through program evaluation across all standards, not just special education, and review the data used to plan for program evaluation and plan support agency-wide.

While the agency participated in the development of the statewide AEA continuous improvement planning process, it was reported during interviews that the agency is still working to understand the overall plan and has not developed a continuous improvement plan specific to Mississippi Bend AEA. It is recommended Mississippi Bend AEA formalize processes for program evaluation and create an agency specific continuous improvement plan which aligns to State Board goals. The AEA needs to ensure the agency creates an agency leadership team with varying levels of expertise and experience within the agency to provide multiple perspectives and distributed leadership in creating the agency's comprehensive improvement plan. Furthermore, the plan should focus on creating an environment which enhances efforts that create sustainability within the system regardless of specific staffing as well as building collective efficacy amongst staff on the impact the agency has in supporting schools to positively impact student outcomes.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standard is met.

Management Services

This section provides evidence of support for management services, including financial reporting and purchasing as requested and funded by local districts.

Strengths

The Mississippi Bend AEA Home School Assistance Program manages all aspects of home-schooling education for eight school districts. The agency also supports schools in extending the continuum of support for students with behavior needs that do not always fit into current mental health programming.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

It is recommended that the AEA continue to provide the Home School Assistance Program for districts, as this is seen as a positive service to districts. It is also recommended that the AEA continue to have other managed services available to districts when needed. This includes having a management services list and request process developed and articulating that process to districts prior to districts needing the services

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standard is met.

Media Services

This section provides evidence of support for instructional media services that supplement and support local districts.

Strengths

Interviews and document review indicate Mississippi Bend AEA Media Services provides a robust collection of digital and print materials. Mississippi Bend AEA participates in the statewide media collaborative to buy down digital media costs and provide consistency in media services to districts. AEA Media Services provides networking opportunities for teacher librarians. This is an opportunity to gather qualitative feedback on possible needs as well as provide professional learning for teacher librarians.

The program audit review indicates a majority of districts in the region utilize Creative Services to design and print instructional materials. During interviews it was stated that production services are available by appointment or walk-in. Patrons can use equipment free of charge; however, there are charges for consumable items, such as lamination and paper.

Mississippi Bend AEA provides virtual professional learning opportunities for teachers and teacher librarians on how to access agency materials and ways to make learning accessible to students with diverse learning needs. Furthermore, the agency provides a curriculum laboratory containing professional learning materials for teachers as well as samples of high-quality instructional materials schools and content consultants can utilize when districts are going through the curriculum adoption process.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

During document review and interviews it was stated the agency utilizes qualitative feedback through surveys and networking opportunities to gather data on potential needs to enhance media services. This data was included in the media services plan; however, there was very little quantitative data shared on media services usage and the impact on student learning outcomes. While the agency documents the services provided through contracts and spreadsheets, there is not a formalized process for needs assessment justifying the need for services or a formal means of evaluating services after they have been provided to monitor, adjust as necessary, or leverage how these services benefit the larger community as a whole. It is suggested the agency find and utilize ways to gather additional quantitative data on media usage and impact on student learning outcomes. It is recommended the agency further refine and formalize the process for media program evaluation within the agency and with districts in order to enhance the media services plan and enhance service delivery to districts.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standard is met.

Conclusion

The team determined the following standards have been met based upon the program audit, clarification call, on-site visit and final verification process:

- School – Community Planning
  - o Standard a – Support for school-community planning, including a means of assessing needs, developing collaborative relationships among community agencies, establishing shared direction, and implementing program plans and reporting progress toward goals for all students, including students with disabilities.
- Professional Development
  - o Standard b - Evidence-based professional development programs that respond to current needs.
  - o Standard q - Support for staff development and adult learners utilizing evidence-based professional development in a manner that meets the professional needs of staff and adult learners consistent with standards adopted by the state board of education.
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
  - o Standard c - Support for curriculum development, instruction, and assessment services that address the areas of reading, language arts, math, and science, using research-based methodologies, for all students, including students with disabilities.
  - o Standard p - Support for students using educational programs and services in a manner that is consistent with the educational standards established pursuant to section 256.11.

- Special Education Services and Support
  - Standard d - Special education support.
  - Standard j - Support for early childhood service coordination for families and children, age birth through three years, to meet health, safety, and learning needs, including service coordination.
  - Standard m - Support for addressing the diverse learning needs of all children and youths, including children and youths who are eligible for special education through services that include direct services to students with disabilities.
- Technology Planning and Services
  - Standard g - Support for school technology planning and staff development for implementing instructional technologies.
  - Standard o - Support necessary to implement effective instruction for all students, including students with disabilities, through school technology services.
- Learning Environment
  - Standard l - Support for schools and school districts in analyzing student achievement data related to the learning environment, comparing data to the external knowledge base, and using that information to guide schools and school districts in setting goals and implementing actions to improve student learning for all students, including students with disabilities.
- Compliance
  - Standard k - Timely submission of required reports and documents to the state board of education, the department of education, and the division of special education of the department of education.
  - Standard n - Support for schools and school districts to ensure compliance with rules adopted by the state board of education related to special education.
  - Standard r - Compliance with all relevant federal and state laws in the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities.
- Program Evaluation
  - Standard h - A program and services evaluation and reporting system that includes information related to special education.
- Management Services
  - Standard e – Management services, including financial reporting and purchasing as requested and funded by local districts.
- Media Services
  - Standard f – support for instructional media services that supplement and support local district media centers and services.
  - Standard l – Support for school district libraries in accordance with section 273.2, subsection 4.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board of Education grant continued accreditation to Mississippi Bend AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed.

Mississippi Bend AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in its budget reviewed for approval by the State Board of Education in March 2026.