

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

July 16, 2025

Agenda Item:	Area Education Agency (AEA) Accreditation Report – Prairie Lakes
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):	Dr. Dan Mart, Chief Administrator Prairie Lakes AEA Kris Ahrens, Administrator of Student and Family Services Prairie Lakes AEA
Attachment(s):	Two
Recommendation:	It is recommended that the State Board of Education grant conditional accreditation for one year to Prairie Lakes AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed. Prairie Lakes AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in quarterly updates to the State Board of Education beginning at its October 2025 meeting.
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.

Prairie Lakes AEA Accreditation Report Summary

Agency Mission and Goals

Prairie Lakes AEA exists to provide effective, efficient and economical services that support high-quality educational opportunities.

- Contribute to a safe, supportive and collaborative environment.
- Build capacity of staff, educational partners, and families to provide high quality learning experiences.
- Promote fiscal and resource sharing opportunities with and among our partners.
- Market the services and resources offered through Prairie Lakes AEA.

Service Area Data

- 36 public school districts
- 13 accredited nonpublic schools
- 31,847 PK-12 students
- 208 total AEA staff members
- Covers 8,072 square miles
- 3 IDEA-DA Level 3 districts
- 8 IDEA-DA Level 2 districts
- 2 ESSA CSI
- 28 ESSA TSI
- Center of Excellence: Explicit Instruction

Required Improvement Actions

Special Education Services and Support

- Identify an administrator (or team) and ensure the leadership has the expertise and authority to perform the assigned duties which include compliance with IDEA Part C and Part B and federal and state requirements for general education programs and services, as well as general supervision. Implement an effective system of communication and feedback loops to ensure responsibilities have been addressed. Communicate role expectations with internal and external personnel.
- Restructure and clarify the purpose of Lakes Partnership School. Appoint a qualified team to oversee the placement process of students and ensure scheduled, frequent reviews of existing placements. A written agreement should include clear expectations for district involvement, conditions for reintegration and a timeline for review upon student placement into the program. Appoint a qualified administrative designee who can serve the necessary function and communicate it to staff. Design a professional learning calendar and plan for staff who serve at Lakes Partnership School.
- Provide Child Find training for staff who complete evaluations for preschool-aged children. The training needs to include content on placement decisions, emphasizing that determination is being made for special education eligibility and not for preschool or a specific placement or location.

Compliance

- The AEA Corrective Action Plan and documentation of corrections of individual noncompliance citations in IDEA Part C must be submitted to the Iowa Department of Education (Department).

Program Evaluation

- Formalize processes for program evaluation and create an agency specific continuous improvement plan which aligns to the State Board of Education goals. The plan should be created by a representative leadership team. The process should be facilitated by outside experts assigned by the Department.

Recommended Continuous Improvement Actions

School-Community Planning

- Establish collaborative teams to support school-community planning, leverage data tools to identify short-term priorities while maintaining focus on a long-term vision for continuous improvement and formalize processes.
- Partner with the Department and AEAs to define and implement consistent school-community planning processes and procedures.

Professional Development

- Develop a systemic plan to ensure the agency's capacity to train IDEA-DA SDI packages and support coaching.
- Strengthen professional learning for staff by embedding implementation science practices.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

- Consider improvements to support districts in curriculum adoption, such as using protocols and implementation science to support implementation and sustainability.
- Increase communication to districts about the support and resources available for 504 and TAG planning.

Special Education Services and Support

- Clarify for staff and district partners AEA involvement in the districts' process of establishing a MTSS.
- Provide professional learning and on-going coaching for staff to build their understanding of all possibilities of how to process a referral, including post-referral screening, for Early ACCESS services.

Technology Planning Services

- Continue to provide professional learning on the role AT plays in providing access to a FAPE for learners.

Learning Environment

- Build capacity of AEA staff and remain flexible with districts that request professional learning supporting positive learning environments.
- Consider how to offer support for all students, even if a district doesn't implement a certain model.

Compliance

- Monitor implementation of the agency's Part C Early ACCESS Services plan.
- Develop a standard communication process to share updates with all staff and across all districts.
- Review and refine current general supervision procedures and ensure consistent application across all groups.

Program Evaluation

- See required action.

Management Services

- Implement a regular review of service delivery, gather input and assess internal capacity to meet needs.

Media Services

- Sustain the agreement with Northwest AEA for media services.

Strengths

School-Community Planning

- There were coordinated planning efforts between the AEA and community programs to serve families and children, birth to age five, including established partnership with Head Start programs.

Professional Development

- The AEA fostered meaningful teaming and collaboration across content areas and specializations.
- SDI trainers and Early ACCESS staff indicated they benefited from participating in Communities of Practice.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

- Content-area professional learning aligned with statewide initiatives.
- EL and TAG support was available on an as-needed basis and 504 resources were available on the website.
- The AEA provided support for curriculum adoption and the selection of HQIM in content areas.

Special Education Services and Support

- Interviewees reported positive, collaborative relationships between district special education staff and agency regional facilitators and AEA special education support and related service providers.
- Interviewees reported the ability to consult with district staff to meet the needs of students across all levels of MTSS.

Technology Planning Services

- The AEA had a high number of IEPs with AT or AEM as a service and has an extensive AT and OT/PT library.

Learning Environment

- Interviewees reported satisfaction with CPI training and Chapter 103 learning opportunities.

Compliance

- The AEA "Meets Requirements" for IDEA Part B, based on compliance with timely initial evaluations, timely evaluations and implementation of IEPs for those transitioning from Part C to B for and secondary services.

Program Evaluation

- The agency used qualitative and quantitative data to analyze program and service delivery.

Management Services

- The AEA provided a variety of managed services like superintendency, business, and technology services.

Media Services

- The agency offered a robust collection of digital and print materials and a Curriculum Library.
- The partnership with Northwest AEA increased the breadth and depth of resources available.

Department Accreditation Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board of Education grant conditional accreditation for one year to Prairie Lakes AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed.

Prairie Lakes AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in quarterly updates to the State Board of Education beginning at its October 2025 meeting.



Department of Education

Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency 2025 Accreditation Report

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Contents

Purpose.....	5
Prairie Lakes AEA Service Area Data.....	5
AEA Accreditation Process.....	5
AEA Accreditation Standards and Results.....	6
School-Community Planning.....	7
Strengths.....	7
Required Actions.....	7
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	7
Standard Met/Not Met.....	8
Professional Development.....	8
Strengths.....	8
Required Actions.....	8
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	8
Standard Met/Not Met.....	9
Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.....	9
Strengths.....	9
Required Actions.....	9
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	9
Standard Met/Not Met.....	10
Special Education Services and Support.....	10
Strengths.....	10
Required Actions.....	10
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	12
Standard Met/Not Met.....	12
Technology Planning and Services.....	12
Strengths.....	12
Required Actions.....	13
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	13
Standard Met/Not Met.....	13
Learning Environment.....	13
Strengths.....	13
Required Actions.....	13
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	13
Standard Met/Not Met.....	13
Compliance.....	13
Strengths.....	13
Required Actions.....	14

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	14
Standard Met/Not Met.....	14
Program Evaluation.....	14
Strengths.....	14
Required Actions.....	14
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	15
Standard Met/Not Met.....	15
Management Services.....	15
Strengths.....	15
Required Actions.....	15
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	15
Standard Met/Not Met.....	15
Media Services.....	15
Strengths.....	15
Required Actions.....	16
Recommendations for Continuous Improvement.....	16
Standard Met/Not Met.....	16
Conclusion.....	16
Recommendation.....	17

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.

Prairie Lakes AEA Service Area Data

Prairie Lakes AEA encompasses

- 36 public school districts
- 13 accredited nonpublic schools
- 31,847 students, preschool through grade 12
- 208 total AEA staff members
- Covers 8,072 square miles
- 3 IDEA-DA Level 3 districts
- 8 IDEA-DA Level 2 districts
- 2 ESSA CSI
- 28 ESSA TSI
- Center of Excellence: Explicit Instruction Practices 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
 - 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
 - Standard b - Evidence-based professional development programs that respond to current needs.
 - 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 i – Support for school district libraries in accordance with section 273.2, subsection 4.

AEA Accreditation Standards and Results

The AEA accreditation on-site visit at Prairie Lakes AEA included several interviews of AEA and district educators; a presentation by the Chief Administrator, Chief Financial Officer, Administrator of Student/Family Services, Facilitator of Educational/Media Services and Regional Administrators; and an observation at a day treatment school for students experiencing social and emotional challenges. 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

Document review and interviews indicated support for coordinated planning efforts between Prairie Lakes AEA and community programs serving families and children from birth to age five. Prairie Lakes AEA maintained an established partnership with the Head Start programs in the area. This included formal Interagency Agreements between the Head Start programs and the Prairie Lakes AEA Early ACCESS and Early Childhood Special Education services. The Interagency Agreements addressed the following services for families and children from birth to age five: Child Find; Family Involvement; Service Coordination; and Professional Learning.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Document review and interviews provided limited evidence of formalized processes to collect and analyze quantitative data to assess school-community needs. The Prairie Lakes AEA's contribution to school-community planning varies significantly from district to district, possibly due to availability of support or collaborative teaming. This contributes to lack of clear, actionable planning.

Collaborative teams had not utilized quantitative data consistently, leading to gaps in communication and continuous improvement planning. The previous use of "Stoplight Reports" helped districts assess their progress and engage in data-driven conversations. However, these reports were not being utilized in the current school-community planning process.

Evidence indicated a clear need to rebuild foundational structures, such as collaborative teams, to facilitate regular reviews of district data, performance trends and emerging needs. Re-establishing a collaborative team structure would lead to strengthening shared decision-making and support more coordinated action planning. Furthermore, Prairie Lakes AEA may consider strategies to leverage data tools more effectively, such as the Self-Assessment of Multi-Tiered System of Support Implementation (SAMi), to identify and address short-term priorities while maintaining focus on a long-term vision for continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the Prairie Lakes AEA's processes could incorporate a cohesive, data-informed approach to school-community planning, ensuring all districts have the support and resources needed for continuous improvement. Using data strategically would enhance the precision and impact of interventions, guiding districts toward more informed and sustainable outcomes.

Consider actions to enhance continuous improvement in the Standard of School-Community Planning. Formalize processes which include clear goals, defined responsibilities and tracking mechanisms for progress. This would provide more structure and accountability in school-community planning. Initiate a review process to clarify the roles of different stakeholders involved in school-community planning. This would ensure everyone knows their responsibilities and can collaborate more effectively. Rebuild and strengthen collaborative teams across Prairie Lakes AEA and districts to facilitate regular data review of performance. This would ensure districts and communities are working together with shared goals and strategies. Prairie Lakes AEA would benefit from leveraging data for an actionable, streamlined decision-making process. Ensure consistent use of data-driven reports, like the Stoplight Reports, and consider tools such as the SAMi to define areas of influence and guide interventions. As an agency, collectively design and implement decision-making processes across districts to avoid delays and

improve efficiency in planning and implementing interventions. The focus should be on making both short-term and long-term improvements based on clear data insights.

In addition, there are inconsistent school-community processes and procedures being used across the AEAs to support school-community planning. What is available is not uniformly being offered or provided to all districts and nonpublic schools in the AEAs. It is recommended that the AEA partner with the Department and the other AEAs in the state to define the expectations for school-community planning and identify common statewide processes and procedures that may be uniformly offered to districts and accredited nonpublic schools.

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 of education.

Strengths

Prairie Lakes AEA staff reported the agency fostered meaningful teaming and collaboration across content areas and specializations. The peer-to-peer collaboration supported creative problem-solving and enhanced the agency's overall capacity to meet district and student needs. Additionally, the agency's regional leadership engaged in professional learning alongside the staff which enhanced the implementation of professional learning.

Prairie Lakes AEA trainers who were assigned to deliver Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) professional learning benefitted from participating in regularly scheduled, state-led Communities of Practice meetings. These meetings provided opportunities for updates on statewide expectations and initiatives, collaboration with peers delivering similar services and engaging in shared problem-solving around SDI implementation and coaching.

Interviewees assigned to Early ACCESS services, birth to three, highly valued participation in statewide Communities of Practice (CoPs), particularly those related to the implementation of family-guided routines-based interventions and service coordination. These CoPs were reported as reliable sources of professional learning and resource sharing, opportunities to generate ideas and strategies and a valuable connection to state-level guidance and consistency.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Comments from interview groups reflected inconsistency in Prairie Lakes AEA support for the implementation of the training and coaching support pertaining to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-Differentiated Accountability (IDEA-DA). The interviewees reported inconsistency of onboarding and sustaining professional support for Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) Trainers. This variability of training has led to concerns about how content knowledge and expertise would be developed and maintained within the agency. It is recommended for Prairie Lakes AEA to develop a systemic, long-term plan to ensure the agency continues to build internal capacity which includes onboarding or training new SDI trainers and coaches, addressing knowledge gaps of SDI content across the regions, outlining expectations for coaches, and providing ongoing training and support to IDEA-DA trainers and practice coaches across content areas.

The review of documents and interviews provided minimal evidence of a formal, strategic plan to build agency-wide capacity of key content areas such as SDI. While collaboration is a strength, Prairie Lakes

AEA would benefit from enhancing its service delivery by removing barriers which limit the scope of support, specifically at a system level such as support for SDI, and at a practice level such as support for Early ACCESS service coordination and Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI). Strengthening professional learning provided to Prairie Lakes AEA staff, embedding implementation science to support continuous improvement and systemic planning, will allow the agency to better meet student needs at all levels and build long-term capacity across the agency and 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

Document review and interviews with Prairie Lakes AEA staff indicated the AEA provided professional learning aligned with statewide initiatives, particularly in core content areas. Professional learning offerings included LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling); intervention systems; and topics tailored to district needs, informed by both quantitative and qualitative data from districts.

The Prairie Lakes AEA provided comprehensive support for districts during the curriculum adoption process. This included the support of selection and implementation of high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials in English language arts, literacy, and mathematics.

In addition to instructional support, Prairie Lakes AEA offered technical assistance for 504 planning via accessible resources available on the agency's website, as confirmed by the document review.

Further, interviews with Prairie Lakes AEA staff reported support for Talented and Gifted (TAG) and Language Instruction for English Learners planning has been provided by AEA consultants on an as-needed basis. To foster collaboration and shared learning, the agency also hosted networking opportunities throughout the school year for educators working in the areas of Talented and Gifted education and English Learner (EL) education.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Interviews with district staff revealed inconsistencies in awareness and accessibility of Prairie Lakes AEA services, particularly in the areas of 504 planning, TAG education, and Language Instruction for English Learners planning. Several interviewees reported they had to independently research available supports, indicating a lack of clear communication or centralized guidance. In some cases, this has led to districts falling out of compliance with legal requirements, particularly concerning Section 504 plans—an issue with potentially serious implications for student rights and district liability. The agency should increase communication with districts about the support available in these areas.

Additionally, curriculum adoption support emerged as a significant area of concern. Interviewees across multiple groups consistently reported limited or no support from Prairie Lakes AEA during the curriculum adoption process. When asked about problem-solving strategies for class wide interventions or strengthening universal instruction in scenarios where 60% or more of students were not meeting benchmarks, interviewees expressed uncertainty about whether Prairie Lakes AEA support was available. Interviewees reported most professional learning was outsourced to external vendors, due in part to inconsistent expertise among Prairie Lakes AEA staff.

Furthermore, document review and interviews did not reference the use of curriculum adoption protocols, such as the EdReports Selecting for Quality: 6 Key Adoption Steps which outlines the different phases of curriculum adoption and provides timelines for schools. These protocols represent research-based tools which have guided districts through the critical phases of curriculum selection; streamline time management and decision-making; and ensure transparency and alignment to quality standards. The absence of the use of such protocols suggested a missed opportunity to create consistency and efficiency in how Prairie Lakes AEA supported districts. The use of protocols would allow Prairie Lakes AEA to maximize limited staff capacity while delivering more coherent and scalable support. Lastly, no evidence was found, either in documentation or interviews, of follow-up support post-adoption, such as implementation coaching; ongoing professional learning; or data-informed adjustments to instruction after new materials were in place.

Prairie Lakes AEA demonstrated a commitment to providing professional learning in evidence-based practices, particularly in literacy and mathematics. The agency has been encouraged to develop and implement actions which will increase consistency and effectiveness of Prairie Lakes AEA's support and help ensure districts will be equipped with the tools and systems needed for sustainable, equitable curriculum implementation.

To ensure consistent, high-quality support across districts, Prairie Lakes AEA may want to consider actions to enhance continuous improvement in the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Standard. The agency would benefit from designing and implementing actions based on implementation science to maintain and promote sustainability and integrate implementation science as a core framework to support districts not only in the adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and ongoing coaching, monitoring, and fidelity of implementation. Strategies for incorporating implementation science as a system of support should be considered, including strategic planning, embedded coaching and feedback loops aligned to district needs. The agency may expand the staff's capacity by providing specialized continuing education to all Prairie Lakes AEA staff who deliver professional learning to ensure deep content expertise and consistent delivery across the AEA and districts. A framework should be used to implement continuous improvement and build follow-up support including coaching, data monitoring and adjustment planning after materials have been adopted.

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

Most interview groups indicated a positive, collaborative relationship among Prairie Lakes AEA regional facilitators and special education support and related service providers with districts' special education staff. Interviews indicated Prairie Lakes AEA staff were able to meet and collaborate with one another for suggestions and generate strategies to address subject matter outside areas of expertise.

Interviewees reported they have been able to consult with district staff regarding programs which meet the needs of all students at various levels, such as facilitating the establishment of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Required Actions

Interviewees representing district leadership expressed concerns regarding inconsistent special education services relative to consultation and problem solving, quality of resources, frequency of contact, accessibility and content expertise of Prairie Lakes AEA staff, which places the AEA at risk of major IDEA violations. The interview groups indicated concerns about the level of support from the

Prairie Lakes AEA administration responsible for special education and agency-wide leadership citing lack of visibility, infrequent sharing of critical information, inconsistent or inaccurate responses and insufficient systems leadership.

The Prairie Lakes AEA chief has a statutory responsibility to identify an administrator (or team) and ensure the leadership has the expertise and authority to perform the assigned duties which include compliance with IDEA Part C and Part B and federal and state requirements for general education programs and services, as well as general supervision in special education. The Prairie Lakes AEA administrative leadership team must implement an effective system of communication and feedback loops to ensure responsibilities have been addressed. Lastly, role expectations need to be communicated with internal and external personnel.

Multiple interviews with staff and administration at Lakes Partnership School, as well as district administration, indicated a need for restructuring and clarifying the purpose of the Lakes Partnership School program. Lakes Partnership School is a Special School, defined as a setting which solely serves students who are eligible individuals for special education. Lakes Partnership School is a 100% restrictive setting where instruction is specially designed and delivered by special education personnel. The IEP Team, including the resident district, determines the placement based on the student's unique social emotional behavior needs. Participating students have no access to general education peers while being served at Lakes Partnership School. Multiple interview group participants reported a general referral process for student placement; however, the process has not been consistently implemented as designed. Interviewees had a strong opinion that some students were placed in the program prior to a comprehensive trial of possible accommodations and modifications in the resident district or were detained from reintegrating to the resident district due to lack of enforcement of Least Restrictive Environment provisions.

The IDEA Part B and Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) for Special Education require written documentation for the placement decision review and answers to the following questions on IEPs of all students in special school placements which solely serve eligible individuals who require special education outside the general education environment:

- *What are the reasons that the eligible individual cannot be provided an educational program in an integrated school setting?*
- *What supplementary aids and services are needed to support the eligible individual in the special education program?*
- *Why is it not possible to provide these aids and services in an integrated setting?*
- *What is the continuum of placements and services available to the eligible individual?*

The Prairie Lakes AEA chief should appoint a qualified team to oversee the placement process of students into the Lakes Partnership School program, and ensure scheduled, frequent reviews of existing placements including resident district participation and have been implemented in accordance with IAC 281-41.116(4).

At the time of a student placement, a written agreement should be forged between the Lakes Partnership School and the resident district which includes clear expectations for district involvement, conditions for reintegration and a timeline for review. District commitments to reintegration planning should include what resources will be committed to enable reintegration, as well as the first reintegration step to be considered when the first milestone is reached. The placement team will be required to oversee regular reviews and ensure that the reintegration process has been implemented with fidelity as a condition of district participation in Lakes Partnership School.

It was unclear from interviews with staff and administration who was the appointed and qualified administrative designee onsite and who their current contact is for professional support at the AEA. Special School programs, by design and definition, serve individuals with the most intensive needs. The chief should appoint and communicate a qualified administrative designee who can serve the functions

necessary to support a Special School program's students and staff daily, and clarify the administrative designee's role and authority.

Additionally, teachers and staff who serve at Special Schools need the most professional learning support because they need to deliver a wide range of general education content as well as very specialized and intensive specially designed instruction. The chief shall work with the administrative designee and a small team of interested representative staff to design a calendar which results in adequate professional learning time for teachers and staff, equivalent to professional learning time allocated to Spencer School District teachers and staff. The team should develop a professional learning plan which allows teachers to become more informed about the general education curriculum they are teaching either through a coaching arrangement or collaboration with general education teachers. Other content will be driven by information gathered from the staff about their needs and performance or observational data from staff and students.

Lastly, interviewees were unable to thoroughly describe the Child Find procedures for children, ages 3 to 5, attending community-based preschool programs who are referred to the special education team. The agency is required to provide Child Find training for staff evaluating preschool-age children or children transitioning from Part C to Part B. The training needs to include content on placement decisions for eligible preschool-age students, emphasizing that determination is being made for special education purposes and not for preschool or a specific placement or location.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Prairie Lakes AEA staff expressed frustration that there are limits to their work in supporting the MTSS framework. It is recommended that Prairie Lakes AEA clarify, for staff and district partners, AEA involvement in the districts' process of establishing a MTSS to ensure alignment with use of funds guidance 20 U.S.C. § 1413(a)(2); Iowa Code § 256B.9(1); id. § 256B.11(e).

Interviewees reported inconsistent Child Find procedures for infants and toddlers referred to Early ACCESS as a result of Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act (CAPTA), diagnosed conditions which were automatically eligible for Early ACCESS or had special health care needs. Interviewees were not able to differentiate the referral, intake, initial evaluation and assessment processes for children automatically eligible for Early ACCESS compared to determination of a developmental delay. While interviewees were aware of the process for determining when to involve Child Health Specialty Services (CHSC) services, a review of CHSC data showed a decrease in the previous two years of children with special health care needs being served by CHSC through service coordination, health assessments or nutrition services, especially in the northern region of the AEA. Learning and ongoing coaching should be provided for early intervention service coordinators and service providers of all possibilities of how to process a referral, including post-referral screening, for Early ACCESS services.

Standard Met/Not Met

The accreditation standards are partially 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

Evidence shows that Prairie Lakes AEA has high percentages of Individualized Education Programs indicating Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) or Assistive Technology (AT) as a service, when compared with the state rate. It was stated across several interview groups that Prairie Lakes AEA has an extensive AT library, as well as Occupational Therapy/Physical Therapy library and there is a

process in place to access these resources. The AEA is supportive when it comes to purchasing new or updated equipment. This was evident across several interview groups.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

District administrators reported inconsistent support for AT problem solving and implementation for students with IEPs. It is recommended that Prairie Lakes AEA continue to provide professional learning to building-based teams regarding the role assistive technology plays in providing a free appropriate public education to individuals with disabilities.

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

Document review and interviews indicated support for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training and Chapter 103. Interview groups with districts indicated satisfaction with CPI and Chapter 103 learning opportunities.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Interview groups with districts voiced frustration with the AEA when districts have switched structures from PBIS to Character Strong and Leader in Me. Individuals from district interview groups stated that there were components and universal tier strategies from PBIS that they still valued. When these districts requested professional learning from the agency in PBIS universal tier strategies, they were told the agency could not offer this training because the district had changed models from PBIS. While the agency may be short staffed, it is suggested the agency work to build capacity with consultants and remain flexible with districts that request professional learning supporting positive learning environments. The agency needs to consider how to offer support which is helpful for all students even though a district may no longer fully implement a certain model or program.

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

In accordance with the IDEA, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires the Iowa Department of Education to make an annual determination for each AEA regarding compliance with, and implementation of, IDEA Part C and IDEA Part B requirements.

The Prairie Lakes AEA's Determination Category for IDEA Part B, Special Education Services, was "Meets Requirements" for FFY 2023 (2023-24) based on compliance in the areas of timely initial evaluations for Child Find; timely evaluations and implementation of an IEP for children transitioning from Early ACCESS; and secondary transition assessments and services and involvement of students and appropriate agencies.

Required Actions

The Prairie Lakes AEA's Determination Category for IDEA Part C, Early ACCESS Services, was "Needs Assistance" for FFY 2023 (2023-24) based on findings of noncompliance in the areas of timely provision of early intervention services; transition planning; and timely transition meetings with Pk-12 special education providers for children potentially eligible for special education.

The Prairie Lakes AEA was notified in December 2024 of requirements to develop and implement a corrective action plan and provide evidence of corrections of individual and systemic noncompliance within one year of notification. As of the Prairie Lakes AEA Accreditation onsite visit, May 20, 2025, the Prairie Lakes AEA had not submitted a corrective action plan or documentation of corrections of individual noncompliance of timely provision of early intervention services.

The Prairie Lakes AEA Corrective Action Plan and documentation of corrections of individual noncompliance of timely provision of early intervention services must be submitted in the ACHIEVE system by June 6, 2025.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Monitor the implementation of actions identified in the agency's Part C, Early ACCESS Services plan, in order to ensure that all actions are completed by the end. In addition, implementing the intended actions should impact staff actions and child and family outcomes.

Develop standard processes and procedures to share special education policy and procedure updates with all relevant staff and with all districts. In addition, standardize general supervision procedures for the agency and implement them consistently. Review and refine current general supervision procedures and ensure consistent application across the AEA and all LEAs. Ensure that the agency's special education leader is proactively monitoring general supervision qualitative and quantitative data to identify needs. When needs are identified, the special education administrator should lead the continuous improvement cycle to address identified needs, monitoring for improvement in implementing expected practices and staff and student outcomes.

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 indicated Prairie Lakes AEA has utilized qualitative feedback and district delivery plans as a means to analyze program and service delivery. The agency also utilized quantitative data such as universal screening data, Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) across grades levels and subjects, postsecondary readiness data and special education data.

Required Actions

It is required that Prairie Lakes AEA formalize processes for program evaluation and create an agency specific continuous improvement plan which aligns to State Board goals, ensuring 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. This process should be facilitated by outside experts assigned by the Iowa Department of Education.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

There are no recommendations for continuous improvement for the Program Evaluation Standard area.

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

Document review referenced the management services available through Prairie Lakes AEA should a district require or need support in areas such as superintendency, personnel, business management, technology, leadership or any other specialized services. A district's superintendent may reach out to the Prairie Lakes AEA chief to request services.

The Prairie Lakes AEA chief meets with the superintendent and other necessary district leadership to discuss the scope of the services needed and the internal capacity within Prairie Lakes AEA to support the need.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

To maintain effective and responsive management services, the agency should implement regular reviews of service delivery models, gather input from district leadership, and assess internal capacity to meet evolving needs. Strengthening communication channels and aligning services with district goals will ensure that support remains timely, efficient, and impactful.

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

Document review indicated Prairie Lakes AEA Media Services offered a robust collection of both digital and print materials to support educators and learners. A notable strength was the agency's collaborative partnership with Northwest AEA, through which the two agencies have combined media collections, increasing the breadth and depth of available resources, and coordinated van delivery services, improving logistical efficiency and access to materials.

In addition, Prairie Lakes AEA participated in the statewide media collaborative, which has reduced digital media costs through collective purchasing and promoted consistency in media offerings across districts.

The Prairie Lakes AEA also maintained a Curriculum Library which houses professional learning materials for educators and high-quality instructional resources, which are particularly valuable to AEA and district staff during curriculum adoption processes.

Required Actions

There are no required actions for this standard area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Given the current sharing agreement between Prairie Lakes AEA and Northwest AEA, the agency has demonstrably increased efficiency and expanded access to resources. It is recommended that this agreement be continued. Sustaining this collaboration will ensure continued cost savings, broader resource availability, and improved support for 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
 - 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
 - Standard b - Evidence-based professional development programs that respond to current needs.
 - 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 i – Support for school district libraries in accordance with section 273.2, subsection 4.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board grant conditional accreditation for one year to Prairie Lakes AEA through the next review period with the required improvement actions completed.

Prairie Lakes AEA will include confirmation of the implementation of all required improvement actions and its work towards recommended improvement actions in quarterly updates to the State Board of Education beginning at its October 2025 meeting.