

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

December 4, 2025

**Agenda Item:** Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency Paraeducator Preparation Program Approval

**State Board Goal:** Goal 3

**State Board Role/Authority:** The State Board of Education sets standards and approves practitioner preparation programs based on those standards. Iowa Code section 256.7(3) and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281–80.

**Presenter(s):** Lindsay Harrison, Education Program Consultant  
Office of Educator Quality

**Attachment(s):** One

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board award full approval to Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency's Paraeducator preparation program through the next review scheduled for the 2031-2032 academic year.

**Background:** Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency in Eastern Iowa has provided evidence that all concentration areas are in compliance with Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-80. Additionally, with this application they propose to add the English as a Second Language concentration.



Department of Education

# **Paraeducator Preparation Program Approval Report**

Mississippi Bend Area Education Association

Review Year: 2025

Presented to the Iowa State Board of Education: December 4, 2025

State of Iowa  
**Department of Education**  
Grimes State Office Building  
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## Review Team Members

Dr. Lindsay Harrison, Office of Educator Quality

Ms. Geri McMahon, Bureau of Educational Examiners

## Recommendation to the Board

Programs	Recommendation
Paraeducator	Approval
Early Childhood	Approval
Autism Spectrum Disorder	Approval
School Library Media	Approval
Special Needs	Approval
New Concentration: English as a Second Language	Approval

## Program Representatives

Heather Whitman, Focus Area Consultant-Media

Lacy Christner, Staff Development Specialist

## Overview

At Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (MBAEA), the mission is to improve teaching and learning for all students through active partnerships and assertive leadership. MBAEA believes the students are our first priority and that every individual has the potential to grow. The paraeducator program equips paraeducators with the skills to serve as vital members of instructional teams, ensuring equitable and effective support for students. Over the past five years, 94 paraeducators have completed the Generalist Programming Courses, and 58 recommendations were made for our Early Childhood, Special Needs, Library Media Technology or Autism Spectrum Disorder area of concentration courses.

Grounded in a belief in equity, accountability and lifelong learning, the program fosters strong partnerships among paraeducators, teachers and administrators. By preparing paraeducators to meet the diverse needs of students, the program helps learners discover their talents, reach their potential, and improve student outcomes.

During this review, MBAEA applied to offer the English as a Second Language (ESL) concentration. This application was reviewed by the Educator Quality team and the Bureau of Educational Examiners (BoEE).

## Iowa Administrative Code rule 281—80.8 Organizational and Resources Standards

*“Organization and resources shall adequately support the preparation of paraeducator candidates to enable them to meet state standards in accordance with the provisions of this rule.”*

The program demonstrates a strong commitment to candidate support by offering a broad range comprehensive supports explaining program expectations and resources. They have a clearly defined structure for clinical experiences and mentorship and a Chromebook loaning initiative, which plays a role in promoting digital equity and ensuring that all students have access to the tools necessary for success in both coursework and field placements. Resources are available to support faculty development and engagement in continuous improvement. The program seeks feedback from participants and makes program improvements accordingly.

The program detailed the plan for additional resources to support the ESL concentration area and the rationale for adding this endorsement to support the needs of districts in their area.

### 281—80.9 Diversity Standards

*“The unit shall ensure that the paraeducator preparation program meets the following diversity standards.”*

The program provides an environment and experiences that foster paraeducator candidates’ growth in the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to support learning in diverse populations and settings. Of participants enrolled in the program 69 percent serve in districts in the AEA region and 31 percent serve elsewhere or are not in a school, 66 percent are working in elementary schools and 51 percent serve in small school sizes. All instructors at MBAEA complete mandatory training aligned with agency policies on equity, harassment and workplace violence, and engage in ongoing professional learning to remain current with evolving practices. The program has policies related to institutional non-discrimination and commitment to fostering an inclusive environment.

### 281—80.10 Faculty Standards

*“Unit staff qualifications and performance shall facilitate the unit’s role in the preparation of a professional paraeducator in accordance with the provisions of this rule.”*

Reviewers had access to resumes for faculty member assigned to teach in the paraeducator program. Faculty members are qualified with related preparation, knowledge and experience aligned with their teaching duties. Faculty are annually evaluated by a certified administrator who annually observes instructors. MBAEA funds professional learning opportunities, such as conference attendance, and organization access for instructors to ensure awareness of best practices and advances in the profession. MBAEA demonstrates strong support for instructors by funding professional learning and organization access to ensure instructors stay current with best practices and advancements in the field.

## 281—80.11 Program Assessment and Evaluation Standards

*“The unit’s assessment system will appropriately monitor individual candidate performance and use that data in concert with other program information to improve the unit and its programs in accordance with the provisions of this rule.”*

The unit gathers assessment data from candidates and implements an assessment process within institutional effectiveness. Across the courses there are various assessments such as mentor feedback, checklists for practicums, rubrics for assignments, and journals to guide learner development. Assignments and activities are directly aligned with the necessary competencies, and candidates receive continuous feedback throughout the courses and program.

During the review process MBAEA detailed additional steps they will take to ensure candidates are evaluated fairly by providing increased communication with mentors, more timely feedback, opportunities for connection after face-to-face courses finish and providing interrater reliability training for their faculty. MBAEA explained participation in statewide collaboration efforts with other AEAs to ensure high quality standards, activities and assessment practices. Rubrics will be revised through participation in this group and program leaders plan one-on-one meetings with instructors to incorporate participant feedback.

In the self-study process MBAEA recognized they need to be more strategic in following up with graduates, though they do use feedback from post course evaluations and detailed ways they have adapted the program design based on this feedback.

## 281—80.12 Clinical Practice Standards

*“The unit and its school partners will provide clinical experience opportunities that assist candidates in becoming successful paraeducators in accordance with the provisions of this rule.”*

The unit has established procedures for the placement, tracking and assessment of candidates during clinical placements. Each candidate is supported by a certified mentor who provides ongoing guidance and observation. Candidates are encouraged to observe varied classrooms, collaborate with administrators, and engage in mentor-led assignments to broaden their skills. Performance is regularly evaluated, and if concerns arise, the instructor and certifying official determine appropriate interventions, such as additional observations or extended placement time.

## Curriculum Reviewed

Curriculum for paraeducator preparation Generalist, Early Childhood, Special Needs, Library Media Technology, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and ESL was submitted according to Iowa Administrative Code chapter 282-24, to BoEE for all concentrations, and was reviewed and approved by BoEE consultants.

## Correlations with Previous Review

This review followed an inquiry-based desk review model, rather than a compliance-driven approach. The focus was on understanding how the institution meets each standard. When clarification or additional information was needed, the review team asked follow-up questions to the unit and in this instance, the unit was able to provide the additional information, without any concerns. For instance, the program was able to provide additional information on how they will manage the new ESL concentration and also reflected in their self-study about gathering better data from graduates. Thus, there were no compliance concerns, as the unit was able to provide documentation demonstrating alignment with all required standards. MBAEA’s program was easy to review with well-organized documents and evidence, they are well connected in the state with others doing this work and it is evident they are driven to help prepare adults to work effectively with children.