

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

April 16, 2026

**Agenda Item:** Heartland Area Education Agency Annual Accreditation Performance Review

**State Board Goal(s):** Goal 2

**State Board Role/Authority:** Iowa Code section 273.10 and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-72 requires the Iowa Department of Education to conduct an accreditation process of the AEA. This is the annual update on the progress since the accreditation on-site visit was completed in the spring 2025.

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**Attachment(s):** Two

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board hear and discuss this information.

**Background:** On July 16, 2025, the State Board of Education granted Heartland Area Education Agency full accreditation status. The AEA is required to complete an annual performance review and provide yearly updates of progress on towards required and recommended actions to the State Board.

## Heartland AEA Annual Accreditation Performance Review Summary

### Standard Area Scores

(Rating Key: 5: Sustaining/Optimizing; 4: Implementation; 3: Initial Implementation; 2: Getting Started; 1: Not Yet Meeting)

Standard Area	AEA	DE	Standard Area	AEA	DE
1. School-Community Planning	4	3	6. Learning Environment	4	4
2. Professional Development	4	3	7. Compliance	4	2
3. Curriculum, Instruction and Assess.	5	3	8. Program Evaluation	3	2
4. Special Education Services	4	2	9. Management Services	5	5
5. Technology Planning & Services	3	2	10. Media Services	4	3

### Required Improvement Actions

#### 1. School-Community Planning (Initial Implementation)

- Submit a copy of the required contract between Des Moines CSD and Heartland to the Department

#### 2. Professional Development (Initial Implementation)

- Submit a copy of the required contract between Des Moines CSD and Heartland to the Department

#### 3. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (Initial Implementation)

- Demonstrate the AEA is providing services and supports in all the content areas of reading, language arts, mathematics and science
- Submit a copy of the required contract between Des Moines CSD and Heartland to the Department

#### 4. Special Education Services and Supports (Getting Started)

- Complete and submit the IDEA Part B Annual Performance Report data review and analysis artifact
- Submit a copy of the required contract between Des Moines CSD and Heartland to the Department

#### 10. Media Services (Initial Implementation)

- Submit a copy of the required contract between Des Moines CSD and Heartland to the Department

### Recommended Continuous Improvement Actions

#### 1. School-Community Planning (Initial Implementation)

- Assess the needs of students, establish a shared vision to support students and share with districts
- Build relationships with charter school to engage in district service plans and support school-community planning
- Continue to build and maintain relationships in nonpublic schools

#### 2. Professional Development (Initial Implementation)

- Strengthen the use of evidence to support data-driven decisions for external professional development
- Collect participant feedback from professional learning
- Address Heartland’s responsibility to provide educational services, including professional development, to charter schools within the Des Moines boundary for the 2026-27 academic year and the financial arrangement for services

#### 3. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (Initial Implementation)

- Continue to implement Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), including a process to monitor implementation of tiered instruction and the impact on students
- Provide additional support for other unique populations
- Document the support provided to address behavioral and functional needs of students
- Gather and use feedback from internal and external stakeholders across the system
- Address Heartland’s responsibility to provide educational services, including curriculum, instruction and assessment services, to charter schools within the Des Moines boundary for the 2026-27 academic year and the financial arrangement for services

#### 4. Special Education Services and Support (Getting Started)

- Review special education full-time equivalent data provided to the districts, not just regional data
- Address Heartland’s responsibility to provide special education services to charter schools within the Des Moines boundary for the 2026-27 academic year and the financial arrangement for services

## 5. Technology Planning Services (Getting Started)

- Provide professional learning on Assistive Technology (AT) and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) for all direct and indirect service providers
- Provide the approved Access for All learning package internally and externally and monitor the impact

## 6. Learning Environment (Implementation)

- Systematically document, implement, monitor and evaluate social-emotional-behavioral services
- Use the internal program review process to evaluate learning environment services and supports

## 7. Compliance (Getting Started)

- Have clear communication structures outlined and documented within the Part B and C Service Delivery Plans
- Determine an evaluation plan the AEA will use to assess its general supervision and compliance processes

## 8. Program Evaluation (Getting Started)

- Demonstrate how the AEA is using the internal program review process to engage in continuous improvement
- Develop a plan to support all districts in the program evaluation process across all standard areas

## 9. Management Services (Sustaining/Optimizing)

- Implement the AEA program review and evaluation process to measure progress and evaluate services
- Provide evidence of the application of the six-step management services process in the next annual review

## 10. Media Services (Initial Implementation)

- Gather additional quantitative data regarding the impact of media services on student outcome
- Use the internal program review framework to determine the impact of media services on student outcomes
- Address Heartland's responsibility to provide media services to charter schools within the Des Moines boundary for the 2026-27 academic year and the financial arrangement for services

## Strengths

### 1. School-Community Planning (Initial Implementation)

- Established a comprehensive school-community service collaboration and five districts used the service
- Used a consistent process with multiple sources of data to develop service delivery plans

### 2. Professional Development (Initial Implementation)

- Used a systematic approach to plan internal professional development based on staff input to identify needs
- Heartland is now offering professional development that is aligned with the approved list from the Department

### 3. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (Initial Implementation)

- Offered support to districts to complete Every Student Succeeds Act requirements
- Provided professional learning continuous improvement and support for high-quality instructional materials
- Provided support for English Learners through a consortium model

### 4. Special Education Services and Support (Getting Started)

- Collaboration with Part C professionals resulted in improved practices for internal and external partners
- Has a plan to address Early Childhood Outcomes and for Family Guided Routines Based Intervention
- Provided Child Find professional learning to maintain consistent practices

### 5. Technology Planning Services (Getting Started)

- AEA has a referral process, along with an accompanying flowchart to demonstrate how to access AT support
- Staff responsible for Child Find are annually reviewing AT and AEM information

### 6. Learning Environment (Implementation)

- Implemented a comprehensive continuum of SEB and mental health supports within an MTSS framework
- Provided professional learning, coaching and consultation aligned to evidence-based practices and staff have embedded support for districts in their daily work, resulting in strengthened educator capacity
- Provided specialized services including therapeutic programming, challenging behavior and autism spectrum disorder consultation, crisis response and behavioral assessment and treatment services

### 7. Compliance (Getting Started)

- Part B and Part C Service Delivery Plans outlined how the AEA ensures reports, documents and internal and external services are provided and monitored
- The AEA has made progress in making adjustments in early childhood staffing levels

### 8. Program Evaluation (Getting Started)

- AEAs collaborated to develop a collaborative, data-driven program review process in districts
- Heartland trained leads in the agency to support the program evaluation process in districts
- AEAs developed an internal program review framework to evaluate fee-based AEA services

### 9. Management Services (Sustaining/Optimizing)

- Written process to provide management services that addresses all components of the standard
- Management services identified a variety of services provided in the region to meet needs through collaboration

## 10. Media Services (Initial Implementation)

- Strong local partnerships and a collaborative network to support districts with a high-quality professional library, curriculum collections
- AEA used the district service plan process and accompanying service agreements, as well as collecting additional data to determine what media services were purchased

### Department Annual Accreditation Performance Review Recommendation

Heartland is **fully accredited** until the Department completes the next on-site accreditation visit and presents its findings to the State Board of Education.

Heartland must complete the two **required actions** (Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Special Education Services) in the Annual Accreditation Performance Review within 30 days of the updated Part B Annual Performance Review data being shared or by June 30, whichever is sooner. Heartland must also continue to complete all **required actions** in its 2025 Accreditation Decision.

Heartland must complete the five **required actions** (School-Community Planning; Professional Development; Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Special Education; Media Services) of providing a copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District to address the educational, media and special education services Heartland will provide to charter schools located within the Des CSD boundary and the financial arrangement for the services to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

As part of Heartland continuous improvement efforts, it is recommended that the AEA advance all identified **recommended actions** as appropriate and continue to build upon its identified **strengths**.



# Heartland Area Education Agency

Annual Accreditation Performance Review

April 2026



Department of Education

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# AEA Annual Accreditation Performance Review

## Introduction

Iowa Code section 273.10 and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-72 requires the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to conduct an area education agency (AEA) accreditation process to determine if the AEA is meeting accreditation standards. AEA statutory accreditation standards established in Iowa Code section 273.11 were revised by 2024 Iowa Acts, chapter 1002 (House File 2612). Specifically, AEA accreditation standards were revised to include an intensified focus on learners with disabilities' services, supports and outcomes. These modifications resulted in clarification regarding the AEA services that must be provided to districts, as well as the AEA services that may be provided to districts when requested, needed or purchased by a district.

All AEAs in the state must provide special education services to districts receiving such services from the AEA. An AEA providing special education services must demonstrate that it is meeting the AEA accreditation standards in the areas of special education services and compliance and all standards pertaining to learners with disabilities. In addition, the AEA must meet all of the federal statutory requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.) and the federal regulations for Part B for school-aged children (34 C.F.R. Part 300) and for Part C Early ACCESS for infants and toddlers (34 C.F.R. Part 303). In addition, the AEA must demonstrate compliance with all relevant special education state law including, but not limited to, Iowa Code chapters 256B and 273 and Iowa Administrative Code chapters 72, 41 and 63.

If the AEA elects to provide the additional general education services to districts in educational and media service areas, the AEA must meet the state law and Iowa Administrative Code requirements. The AEA must also meet accreditation standards in the relevant standard area in order to be able to provide the services to districts. Examples of these standard areas include professional development, media services, management services and program evaluation.

The AEA accreditation process is cyclical. It begins with an on-site visit with the purpose of determining if the AEA meets the AEA accreditation standards. It results in a recommendation to the State Board of Education (State Board) that the AEA is accredited, conditionally accredited, or not accredited. The on-site visit also results in the identification of strengths, as well as required and recommended actions to support continuous improvement action plans within the AEA.

In subsequent years, the AEA participated in the Annual Accreditation Performance Review process. The purpose of the Annual Accreditation Performance Review is to further the continuous improvement process within the AEA in partnership with the Department. The Annual Accreditation Performance Review results in a review of progress from the prior year(s) to current year, identification of strengths, required actions the AEA must implement and recommended actions the AEA may implement in order to progress toward optimizing implementation of the AEA accreditation standards.

## AEA Annual Accreditation Performance Review Process

The Annual Accreditation Performance Review consisted entirely of a permanent product review. The Department determined a set of standard-aligned, required artifacts that each AEA was required to submit. The AEA was able to submit additional artifacts in each standard area to demonstrate current performance or progress in the standard area from the prior year(s). The AEA also completed a self-reflection in which the AEA identified strengths, continuous improvement needs, and an AEA score in each standard area using the provided AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration.

A three-person team was assigned to each standard area. Each person reviewed the submitted documents, the AEA's self-reflection information and the AEA-submitted score. Each person identified strengths, areas for growth and a score for the assigned standard area. The three members of the standard area team then collaborated to determine the final score for the AEA using the AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration. The scoring team also collaboratively identified strengths, required actions and recommendations for continuous improvement in each standard area. The following are the results for Heartland AEA (Heartland) for academic year 2025-2026.

## **AEA Annual Accreditation Performance Review Results**

### **1. 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.

*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.*

#### **AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating**

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation      Department rating: Three - Initial Implementation

#### **Strengths**

Heartland has established a comprehensive school and community service collaboration. Evidence indicated that five districts have engaged in this service with the AEA. Artifacts demonstrated a consistent process for working with districts to develop service delivery plans. The district service delivery plan process includes district-specific considerations, successes and recommendations based on district needs as well as multiple sources of data. The AEA also provided evidence of working toward recommended actions from the 2025 accreditation report.

#### **Required actions**

A copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District must be submitted to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

#### **Recommendations for continuous improvement**

It is recommended that Heartland provide evidence of assessing the needs of students and provide more details about how the AEA has established a shared vision to support student success with the districts they serve. For example, while engaging in the district service plan meetings, Heartland should demonstrate how the AEA shared vision is leading to action in the field and collaboratively impacting student outcomes. In addition, it is recommended that Heartland build relationships with the charter schools in the region in order to engage in district service planning meetings and to support school-community planning. Lastly, noting Heartland's increasing number of nonpublic schools, it will be critical for Heartland to continue to build and maintain relationships with nonpublic schools.

## 2. 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.

*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.*

### AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation      Department rating: Three - Initial Implementation

### Strengths

Heartland demonstrated a systematic approach to planning internal professional development using data to guide aligned topics. Evidence indicated that the AEA gathers and analyzes staff input to identify priority learning needs and uses this information to deliver targeted professional learning. The professional development was responsive to identified needs and contributed to the statewide AEA efforts. Heartland is now offering professional development that is aligned with the approved list from the Department. Evidence indicated participation by public and some nonpublic districts in a wide variety of the AEA professional development offerings.

### Required actions

A copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District must be submitted to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

### Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland strengthen the use of evidence or data collected and used to support ongoing data-driven decisions for external professional development. It is recommended that Heartland collect participant feedback from professional learning and review implementation documentation to ensure the professional development delivered aligns with the approved professional learning offerings. It is recommended that Heartland address the contractual relationship between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District in order to clarify Heartland's responsibility for delivering educational services, including professional learning, to charter schools for the 2026-2027 academic year and the financial arrangements for these services.

## 3. 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.

*Standard C - Support for curriculum development, instruction, and assessment services that address the areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, 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 Iowa Code section 256.11.*

### AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Five - Sustaining/Optimizing      Department rating: Three - Initial Implementation

## Strengths

The AEA submitted three artifacts for the team to review in this standard area. The “ESSA and Continuous Improvement” artifact indicated that Heartland is offering support to districts to complete the required actions in the Every Student Succeeds Act, like the data review process. The artifact also provided details about AEA support for implementing high-quality instructional materials in mathematics through the selection and scalability of resources, as well as the advancement of evidence-based literacy and specially designed instruction through Science of Reading professional learning. The nonpublic district service plan artifact included a list of qualified consultants available to provide services in multiple content areas. The last artifact provided information about the services the AEA provides to districts for English Learners (EL), Talented and Gifted Learners (TAG), and students with 504 plans. The AEA mobilizes EL support through a comprehensive needs assessment process to identify priorities, delivering services through a consortium model. Additional EL and the TAG and 504 support services are available to districts for a fee.

## Required actions

In order to demonstrate full compliance with the standards in this area, Heartland is required to demonstrate that the AEA is providing services in all content areas specified in the curriculum, instruction and assessment standards. Heartland must provide evidence by June 30 and in the next review cycle.

A copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District must be submitted to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland continue to provide support for MTSS Tier 2 and Tier 3 work in the AEA and in districts, as well as continuing to track and monitor implementation of tiered instruction across districts. It is recommended that the MTSS work continues to ensure consistency of implementation and sustained impact upon student outcomes throughout the AEA. Evidence indicates that the AEA is supporting curriculum, instruction and assessment work for English learners, talented and gifted students and students with Section 504 plans. Heartland should consider providing curriculum, instruction and assessment support for additional unique populations, such as special education, at-risk and students in foster care. Evidence of addressing functional and behavioral needs of students and districts would also be beneficial. Lastly, it is recommended that a structured process occur to gather and use feedback from internal and external stakeholders across the system as it pertains to this standard area. It is recommended that Heartland address the contractual relationship between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District in order to clarify Heartland’s responsibility for educational services, including curriculum, instruction and assessment services, in charter schools for the 2026-2027 academic year and the financial arrangements for these services.

## 4. 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.

*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.*

## AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation      Department rating: Two - Getting Started

### Strengths

Heartland provided evidence of staff allocations and assignments in special education service areas for full- and part-time employment. Unique to Heartland was the support provided to districts to create a photo directory of AEA staff. These directions are provided to districts in August to support relationships. In addition, evidence indicated collaboration with other professionals in Part C Early ACCESS that resulted in improved practices for internal and external partners. Heartland provided a clear plan to address Early Childhood Outcomes and activities and strategies developed for Family Guided Routines Based Intervention with specific progress monitoring processes and procedures. Lastly, evidence indicated that Heartland provided Child Find professional learning to maintain consistent practices throughout the AEA. In addition, the AEA provided learning that was unique to service providers' discipline areas and provided professional learning for those evaluating students aged three to five and for Part C to Part B transitions.

### Required actions

Heartland is required to complete the IDEA Part B Annual Performance Report data review and analysis artifact within 30 days of the updated Part B Annual Performance Review data being shared or by June 30, whichever is sooner and in the next review cycle.

A copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District must be submitted to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

### Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland address the contractual relationship between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District in order to clarify Heartland's responsibility for Child Find and the delivery of special education related services in charter schools for the 2026-2027 academic year and the financial arrangements for these services.

It is recommended that Heartland provide and review special education full-time equivalent (FTE) data provided to the districts, not just the FTE provided to regions in the allocation process. This level of detail may assist with more in-depth decision making and resource allocation.

## 5. 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.

*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.*

## AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Three - Initial Implementation      Department rating: Two - Getting Started

### Strengths

Heartland has partnered with Green Hills AEA in the development of the Assistive Technology (AT) Center of Excellence. Heartland has three AT Consultants that participate on the Center of Excellence

team in addition to providing direct coaching, collaboration and consultation to support implementation of AT and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) for internal and external partners. Heartland also provided evidence of a referral process, along with an accompanying flowchart to demonstrate how services are accessible for internal and external partners. The clear referral process included individual contacts when there is interest in AT support. In addition, the AEA provided evidence that the Center of Excellence is developing professional learning. When finished, the AEA plans to provide this content to special education and Early ACCESS providers to promote consistency in practice and access for internal and external partners, including families. Staff responsible for Child Find are annually reviewing AT and AEM. Heartland's Part C and Part B staff have completed the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT) Survey. Heartland has indicated these results will be used to develop professional learning for the 2026-2027 school year.

## Required actions

There are no required actions.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

Heartland is currently providing ongoing updates on AT and AEM to speech language pathologists. It is recommended that Heartland provide professional learning on AT and AEM for all direct and indirect service providers. The AEA completed the QIAT survey but has not yet used the results. It is recommended Heartland use the results and provide evidence of such in next year's annual performance review. It is recommended that the Department-provided Access to All learning package be provided, when available, internally and externally to increase the comprehensiveness of staff development, coaching and technology integration across all disciplines for AEA staff, districts and families. It is also recommended that Heartland monitor the number of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) with reading goals and number of IEPs with AT and AEM to monitor the impact of the AEA's work over time.

## 6. 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 toward improving the learning environment and social-emotional-behavioral (SEB) outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

*Standard 1 - 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.*

## AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation      Department-rating: Four - Implementation

## Strengths

Heartland provided evidence that showed strong implementation of a comprehensive continuum of SEB and mental health supports within an MTSS framework to assist districts in creating safe, healthy and welcoming learning environments. Evidence indicated the AEA provides professional learning, coaching and consultation aligned to evidence-based practices such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, trauma-informed practices, Youth Mental Health First Aid, functional behavior assessments and intervention planning. Staff have embedded support for districts in their daily work, which has resulted in strengthened educator capacity to address student behavioral and mental health needs. The AEA provides specialized services including therapeutic programming, challenging behavior and autism spectrum disorder consultation, crisis response and behavioral assessment and

treatment services. The offering of specialized services demonstrates a comprehensive system of support aligned with research-based practices benefitting internal and external partners.

## Required actions

There are no required actions.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland develop a systematic approach to document, implement, monitor and evaluate SEB services and supports. It is recommended that Heartland continue to engage in efforts to improve the learning environment, SEB and mental health outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities. It is also recommended that Heartland complete an internal program evaluation review of the learning environment services the AEA offers, based on qualitative and quantitative data, to determine the efficacy of services and to guide future decisions.

## 7. 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.

*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.*

## AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation      Department rating: Two – Getting Started

## Strengths

Heartland completed all expected submissions to the Department in a timely manner. The Part B and Part C Service Delivery Plans clearly outlined how the AEA ensures reports, documents and internal and external services are provided and monitored. The previous on-site visit accreditation resulted in a recommendation for Heartland to examine Early Childhood staffing, and the AEA provided evidence of working toward making these adjustments.

## Required actions

There are no required actions.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland have clear communication structures outlined and documented within the service delivery plans, including evidence of communication with internal and external partners. It is also recommended that Heartland determine an evaluation plan that identifies the qualitative and quantitative data that will be used to measure the initiatives related to compliance in order to determine the AEA's baseline data, assess progress and measure implementation fidelity. This continuous improvement and evaluation process would lead to prioritized action steps matched and adapted to AEA needs in the area of compliance.

## 8. Program Evaluation

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

*Standard H - A program and services evaluation and reporting system that includes information related to special education.*

### AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Three - Initial Implementation

Department rating: Two – Getting Started

#### Strengths

As an AEA system, the nine AEAs collaborated to develop a program review process that can be consistently implemented in districts. The AEA program review is a collaborative, data-driven process designed to help districts identify what is working, where improvements are needed, and how to strengthen outcomes for students with disabilities. The review focuses on continuous improvement, equity and alignment with IDEA and district priorities. It examines seven core areas, including equitable representation and access; professional learning and teaching capacity; compliance with IDEA; family, student and community engagement; student performance and postsecondary achievement; general supervision and leadership; and continuum and delivery of services and programs in the district. In Heartland, trained program review leads to support the program evaluation process in districts. The submitted artifacts indicated that no districts requested the services this academic year.

The AEA system has also developed an internal program review framework. The internal program review process is to be used to evaluate any fee-based AEA service and is intended to evaluate the “quality, consistency, equity and impact” of services provided to districts. The internal program review framework aligns with the continuous improvement process.

#### Required actions

There are no required actions.

#### Recommendations for continuous improvement

No artifacts were included to indicate whether or not Heartland has engaged in using the internal program review framework. In order to show growth in this standard area, it is recommended that Heartland include artifacts that demonstrate how the AEA is using the internal program review to engage in the continuous improvement cycle. In addition, Heartland should develop a plan to support all districts in the program evaluation process across all standard areas.

## 9. Management Services

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

*Standard E – Management services, including financial reporting and purchasing as requested and funded by local districts.*

### AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Five - Sustaining/Optimizing

Department rating: Five - Sustaining/Optimizing

#### Strengths

Artifacts provided by Heartland demonstrated a written process the AEA follows in order to provide management services. The process addresses all required components of the standard. The budget

also showed alignment to the management services provided. The management services list identified a variety of services provided throughout the region in order to meet the identified needs. Lastly, the management services plan and budget provided an overview of collaboration with methods of communication and services for internal and external partners.

## Required actions

There are no required actions.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

It is recommended that Heartland provide clear evidence of procedures the AEA is using to assess current baseline performance of management services, measure progress and demonstrate growth in services over time. It would also be beneficial for the AEA to identify how it will use quantitative and qualitative data to refine services and also proactively improve and define services through a continuous feedback process with stakeholders. In addition, it is recommended that Heartland provides evidence of application of the six-step management services process at a deeper level in the next annual review.

## 10. Media Services

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

*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 Iowa Code section 273.2, subsection 4.*

## AEA accreditation standard innovation configuration rating

AEA self-rating: Four - Implementation

Department rating: Three - Initial Implementation

## Strengths

Artifacts demonstrated strong partnerships with local organizations. Heartland has a professional library catalog that provides high quality instructional materials and a collection of curricular materials accessible to external partners through the lending library. Evidence indicated that the AEA uses the district service plan process and accompanying service agreements, as well as collecting additional data to determine what media services are purchased. Artifacts also revealed that the AEA engages with internal and external partners through statewide networks to support work in this standard area.

## Required actions

A copy of the contract between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District must be submitted to the Department for review by June 1, 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year.

## Recommendations for continuous improvement

Heartland currently collects qualitative feedback and uses this data to identify potential needs related to media services. It is recommended that the AEA gather additional quantitative data regarding the impact of services on student outcomes. It is recommended that Heartland use the AEA-developed internal program review framework and formalize the needs assessment and evaluation of media services, including a focus on student outcomes. It is recommended that Heartland address the contractual relationship between Heartland and Des Moines Public School District in order to clarify

Heartland's responsibility for media services in charter schools for the 2026-2027 academic year and the financial arrangements for these services.

## Conclusion

Heartland is fully accredited until the Department completes the next on-site accreditation visit and presents its findings to the State Board of Education.

Heartland must complete the two required actions (Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Special Education Services) in the Annual Accreditation Performance Review within 30 days of the updated Part B Annual Performance Review data being shared or by June 30, whichever is sooner. Heartland must also continue to complete all required actions in its 2025 Accreditation Decision.

It is recommended that Heartland continue to build upon its identified strengths and engage in improvement efforts in the standard areas as part of AEA continuous improvement efforts.