

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

April 16, 2026

Agenda Item: Accreditation Report Comprehensive State Evaluation - Northwest Iowa Community College

State Board Goal: Goal 4

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

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Attachment(s): One

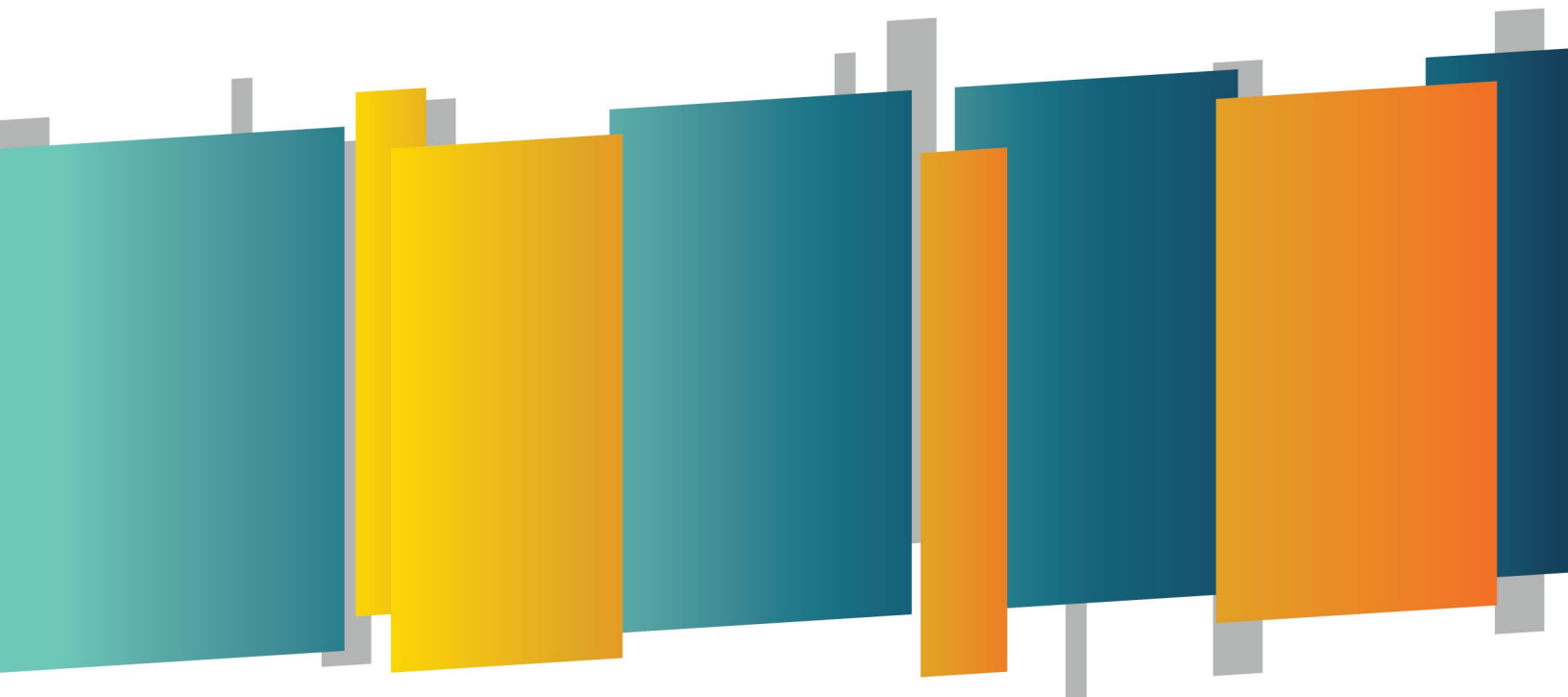
Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation for Northwest Iowa Community College.

Background: As mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47, the Bureau of Community Colleges conducted the comprehensive accreditation evaluation of Northwest Iowa Community College. The Department team and two external reviewers conducted a desk review, outcomes benchmark review and assurance interviews to evaluate Northwest Iowa Community College. The attached report reflects the results of the comprehensive evaluation, which included a site visit on November 13-14, 2025.

Accreditation Report Comprehensive State Evaluation

Northwest Iowa Community College

November 12-14, 2025



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

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Purpose of the State Evaluation

The purpose of this report is a summary of the scheduled state comprehensive accreditation evaluation of Northwest Iowa Community College (NCC) by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) as mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47(3).

Institutional Overview and Outcomes Profile

Northwest Iowa Community College (NCC) is a public institution of higher education which encompasses all of Lyon, O'Brien, Osceola, and Sioux counties and half of Cherokee county in Northwest Iowa. NCC's service area has a total population of 68,590 and is bordered by South Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska and is governed by an elected seven-member board of trustees who represent separate districts. NCC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission.

NCC began as a pilot program sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction and administered by the Sheldon Community School District under the name of Northwest Iowa Vocational School (NIVS). The vocational school became sanctioned and began classes in January 1964 with 49 students. When the state of Iowa passed Senate File 550 in 1965 establishing the current community college system, Merged Area IV representing seven school districts was approved and became officially recognized as NIVS in 1966.

Unlike the community colleges that began as junior colleges, NCC has roots deep in technical instruction, and by the early 1970s had 38 programs. In 1973, when needs in the service regions changed, the college applied for approval to provide an Associate of Arts degree, which was approved in 1975 and received accreditation from the North Central Association to deliver diplomas and degrees. The college changed its name to Northwest Iowa Technical College to reflect both the established vocational emphasis and its new transfer option. On July 1, 1993, the name of the college was changed to Northwest Iowa Community College to reflect its status as a comprehensive community college. NCC is also a founding member of the Iowa Community College Online Consortium, which was established in 1999, to offer online courses and resources across seven of Iowa community colleges.

Today, students can choose from 28 career and technical education (CTE) programs of study including business, information technology, electrical, construction, health, manufacturing and transportation.

College outcomes are submitted annually through the Bureau of Community College's management information system with the results of the data available at IowaStudentOutcomes.com. In fiscal year (FY) 2024, NCC enrolled 2,748 credit students which includes 29.5% enrolled in CTE programs, 43.7% enrolled in concurrent enrollment; and 374 degrees, diplomas and certificates conferred. NCC also enrolled 4,509 noncredit students which includes 84.5% enrolled in CTE programs, 14.9% transferring to credit education after noncredit completion and 405 adult basic education students.

The Department team reviews outcomes in key areas related to student success, CTE and college readiness. The key areas are reviewed in five-year performance trends for the college, in comparison to Iowa's community college benchmarks and with national community college benchmarks. NCC's highlighted outcomes include:

- Two-year completion rate of 52.6% leads the state by nearly 23% and the nation by nearly 30%.
- Six-year completion rate of 58.3% leads the state by nearly 21% and the nation by 26%.
- Student success rate at the end of year two of 60.3% leads the state by 13% and the nation by nearly 26%, and the rate at the end of year six of 74.2% leads the state by 14% and the nation by over 20%.
- Transfer rates at the end of years two and six have improved significantly over five years but remain lower than state and national benchmarks.
- CTE associate degrees were received by 47.1% of students which leads both national and state benchmarks.
- Students who needed developmental math became college ready (70%) at a rate exceeding state (58.6%) and national (41.1%) benchmarks.

- Students reaching credit threshold expectations have dipped slightly since 2020 to 65.8% but they continue to outperform both the state (54.6%) and national (46.1%) benchmarks.

The Department team found no evidence of significant declining outcomes in any of the key outcome areas.

State Evaluation Summary

The Department's Bureau of Community Colleges conducted a comprehensive accreditation evaluation of NCC that included a desk review of written materials submitted by the college, review of annual outcomes data and on-site assurance interviews conducted on November 12-14, 2025.

The Department team was impressed with many aspects of the college.

- Student-centered approach with focus on meeting the student where they are which is demonstrated by faculty and staff stopping what they may be doing to meet a student's need.
- Core values are founded in service and success.
- Focus on continuous improvement by looking at data to identify opportunities for improvement which includes monitoring retention on a daily basis.
- Commitment to CTE programming and workforce development in an "exceptionally rural" location.

Standards for Accreditation

Prior State Evaluation

The 2021 Interim State Evaluation Report identified no findings.

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Department team reviewed the most recent HLC report and information available at the time of this evaluation. HLC conducted NCC's Reaffirmation of Accreditation in October 2024. The HLC team determined that Core Component 4.B was met with concerns. The HLC evaluation team indicated NCC was "on the right path with academic and non-academic assessment," but cited six opportunities to improve on its implementation of learning assessment. NCC will submit an interim monitoring report to HLC in spring 2027 to ensure the college has addressed the opportunities for improvement. The college's next Reaffirmation of Accreditation is during the 2034-35 cycle.

The Department team conducted a desk review of the college's HLC materials and an assurance interview related to the HLC interim monitoring report and opportunities for improvement. The Department team determined the college reported an effective process for completing the required elements of the interim report and requests the college submit a copy of the interim monitoring report and the related follow-up correspondence from HLC when it is submitted and received in 2027.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 1: Faculty Qualifications

All community college-employed instructors who are under contract as of July 1, 2011, who teach in CTE or arts and sciences (including adjuncts) are required to meet minimum faculty standards (Iowa Code section 260C.48).

To ensure compliance with the standard, the Department team provided NCC a random list of 20 faculty members who taught credit courses the previous year. The college submitted documentation of qualifications for these faculty, including supporting documentation such as college transcripts, employment applications, to illustrate related work experience and third-party licensure/certification, if applicable. The Department team examined the files to determine whether the qualifications of each faculty member complied with Iowa Code for the courses they taught during the 2024-2025 academic year (AY). The Department team concluded that the faculty files were thoroughly completed, reviewed and documented by the college.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 2: Faculty Teaching Load

The teaching loads of full-time instructors must not exceed the faculty teaching load limits set forth in Iowa Code. This is the case for both CTE instructors and arts and sciences instructors. If the instructor and the community college administration mutually consent then the instructor may be assigned additional teaching load (Iowa Code chapter 260C.48).

To confirm compliance with this standard, the Department team reviewed instructional load documentation for 20 randomly selected AY 24-25 faculty members. No load compliance issues were identified for the selected faculty.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 3: Special Needs and Protected Classes

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

The Department team conducted a desk review to evaluate NCC's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and nondiscrimination policies, statements and practices in marketing and recruitment publications, handbooks, the college catalog, the college website and sample course syllabi. During the site visit, the Department team reviewed additional documentation and conducted interviews with faculty, students and staff associated with student special needs and disabilities services to ensure compliance with this standard. The Department team saw evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students, provide accommodations for students with special needs and provide opportunities for underrepresented students in particular programs of study. The Department team commends NCC's commitment to the success of all students. A sample of evidence includes:

- Using the Simple Syllabus software to ensure the continuous notice of nondiscrimination is included and consistent in all course syllabi, and ensuring the notice is included in important documents like the catalog and various handbooks for faculty, staff and students.
- Utilizing disaggregated data to review and make adjustments as needed to better serve students and help them succeed.
- Applying the guided pathways model and tracking key performance indicators to help students identify a path, get on a path and stay on a path to complete their academic and career goals.
- Providing an effective accommodations services program which was evidenced by all faculty, staff and students knowing the coordinator by name.
- Including information on confidentiality in the college catalog, specifically as it relates to Title IX policies and processes.

The Department team noted during the desk review that the annual notice for nondiscrimination did not include contact information for all of the Title IX/504 Coordinators—only that for the human resources director. The Department team **recommends** that NCC add additional contact information for all Title IX and ADA/504 coordinators for both employees and students. In addition, the Department team

identified several issues with the continuous notice of nondiscrimination including that it was missing from multiple documents, it is not prominently located or it is difficult to locate in some documents and the font size is too small to read on some marketing materials. The Department team **recommends** that NCC update existing non-compliant documents and establish a procedure to ensure that the continuous notice is included, prominent and readable in all publications such as marketing materials like postcards, viewbooks and information flyers.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 4: Career and Technical Education (CTE) Evaluation

Iowa Code chapter 258, Iowa Administrative Code subsection 281-46.6(4) and Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-21 include the state standards related to the offering of CTE programs. These standards include, among other components, requirements related to program and award length, program content, labor market demand, articulation and advisory committees. All CTE programs, including both new programs and modifications to existing programs, must be approved by the Department. Community colleges are required to review at least 20 percent of their CTE programs annually.

The Department team conducted a desk review and assurance interview related to NCC's CTE program review process. The college reviews the required 20% of its CTE programs each year. During the program review process, program faculty members review data, examine the previous cycle program goals and complete a self-study template, which has been revised for the current academic year. A college program review team evaluates the program's self-study document to assess the extent that each program review addresses the state CTE evaluation standards using a Review Team Summary Rubric, identifies opportunities for improvement and makes recommendations to the college's Executive Council. Following this review, the chief academic officer and division dean meet with the program instructor to develop an action plan with follow-up expectations for the recommendations. Completed program evaluation reports are submitted to the president, Executive Council and program's advisory council.

The Department team was impressed with several aspects of program review at NCC including:

- The program review team represents multiple stakeholders from the college which ensures that the student perspective is represented. Team membership includes the registrar, program advisor or a student services representative, academic representatives and the assessment committee chair. Review teams may also include an advisory council member and a current or previous student.
- The program review process is reviewed annually by college academic leadership who solicit input from faculty and staff members involved in the program evaluation process. This yields opportunities to review both the process and the quality of information obtained by the process. The college is commended for responding to this recommendation in the previous state accreditation evaluation.
- The college strives to determine the student return on investment by using a formula that compares tuition, fees, books and other expenses to the salaries that program graduates earn after completing the program.
- NCC's annual learning assessment process is incorporated into the program review through both assessment of both program and general education outcomes.
- Faculty members are asked to assess the program's learning facilities, equipment and other learning resources in relation to achievement of program goals.
- Programs ensure that students are involved in career and technical student organizations such as SkillsUSA, HOSA and other local co-curricular opportunities and events. Program faculty members also review how students in the program participate in community service opportunities.

- The college endeavors to remove barriers for students in programs. For example, NCC collaborated with their local area education agency to provide training for faculty and staff after it identified that native Spanish-speaking students were struggling more than other students.

Recommendations: Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-46 requires that the CTE program review process includes specific components including assessing if student outcomes are disaggregated and addressed by the program and if the program aligns to additional education and training opportunities. These standards were not addressed thoroughly in the college’s previous program review template and through the examples the Department team reviewed. The newly revised program review template includes a more thorough review of each of the state program review standards. The Department team **recommends** that NCC ensure compliance with each of the program review standards by continuing to use their new template for program review. The Department team also **recommends** that all programs, not just those with low evaluation rubric scores, complete an annual action plan to set priorities, close the loop on goals and focus on program continuous improvement, innovation and growth.

The desk review process revealed limited documentation of committee discussion by advisory council members. The Department team **recommends** that NCC ensures advisory council agendas and minutes document substantive input which is representative of the variety of viewpoints from advisory council members. Although the college has strong advisory council materials incorporated into the program review process, desk review evidence provided did not offer documentation that the paraeducator, design technology and heavy equipment programs meet twice per year, as required in Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-46. Therefore, the Department team **recommends** that the college ensure that all program advisory councils meet twice per year.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Promising Practice Profile

The Department team identified a promising practice within the CTE program evaluation standard as an exemplary model. NCC maintains a culture focused on results which includes CTE program activities that focus on improving student outcomes and continuous program improvement aligned with the high impact practices of the college’s guided pathways initiative. Examples include:

- Assessing the required knowledge and skills graduates need to learn as part of the CTE program.
- Analyzing the relationship between the general education courses required in CTE programs in relation to essential knowledge required for program graduates.
- Strategically placing internships and other work-based learning opportunities within CTE programs.
- Engaging the advising and learning support staff in the program review process.
- Promoting curriculum alignment between secondary and postsecondary CTE programs by encouraging NCC program faculty members to participate on high school program review committees.
- Cross walking the new CTE program review self-study template to align the state CTE program evaluation standards with the college’s guided pathway model.

Further, NCC’s exceptional CTE outcomes are a result of the college’s strong commitment to CTE programming and workforce development which have resulted in high wage outcomes and a positive student return on investment, even in their “exceptionally rural” northwest Iowa location. Graduates of CTE programs, even those who earn short-term awards, earn higher salaries than those from peer community colleges after accounting for cost-of-living variances.

Standard 5: Facilities, Parking Lots and Roads

Each community college must present evidence of adequate planning to the Department team, including a board-approved facilities plan (Iowa Administrative Code subsection 281-21.62(5)). The community college's plan must meet state and federal requirements as outlined in the state accreditation guide.

The Department team reviewed desk review materials and conducted assurance interviews related to compliance with the facilities, parking lots and roads state standard. NCC's most recent facilities plan was approved by the college's board of directors in January 2025 and complies with state standards.

Major facility additions, upgrades and overall college improvements are linked to the Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP). NCC's safety and technology committees meet monthly to ensure facility and student needs are being met. Students and staff have access to the RAVE panic button application in the event of an emergency or to receive critical campus notifications. With 300 security cameras and access to electronic locks, students and staff reported feeling safe on campus. The Department team was impressed with NCC's dedication to improving the physical plant and facilities for students, staff and their community including:

- NCC's impeccable CTE program facilities are technologically advanced, clean, spacious and inviting to current and future students.
- Onsite emergency response team.
- Partnership agreements with area industries for sharing equipment.
- Safety training provided for students and employees: ALICE, CPR, wellness, cybersecurity and domestic abuse.
- Safety communication with students and staff is evidenced in multiple handbooks and on NCC's website.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 6: Institutional Effectiveness and Outcomes-Based Planning

Community colleges are required to update their strategic plans at least every five years as a guide for the college and its decision making (Iowa Administrative Code subsection 281-21.62(6)).

The Department team reviewed NCC's most recent strategic plan and interviewed selected staff to ensure compliance with this standard. The Department team identified several areas of strength related to institutional effectiveness and outcomes-based planning.

- The college maintains an outcomes-focused culture which includes extensive data to inform nearly every decision, college leaders have access to daily outcomes reports, and faculty can easily access data upon request without delay.
- ISP is integrated throughout the institution through departmental plan crosswalks and the annual performance review process which requires staff to connect their work to the ISP.
- Twice per year, the ISP operational plans are updated and distributed broadly to include the latest data reports and an "honest report on progress" using a "completed, ongoing, or short of completion" rubric.
- "Just ask" sessions are offered monthly for all employees to ask questions related to board meetings and strategic planning.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 7: Quality Faculty Plan

Iowa law mandates that community colleges plan for faculty hiring and professional development, with institutional Quality Faculty Plans (QFPs) needing to meet the standards outlined in Iowa Administrative Code subsection 281-21.62(7).

The Department team conducted a thorough review of NCC's QFP, which included an evaluation of the plan documentation against state standards and assurance interviews with the college's QFP Committee members and general faculty members. To ensure compliance verification, the Department team also reviewed the AY 24-25 QFP documentation for a random sample of 20 faculty members.

The QFP Committee is a collaborative body, with faculty members appointed by the faculty bargaining unit and administrators appointed by the college administration. The plan operates on an annual cycle which includes committee review and plan updates as needed and governing board approval in June. The college provided board minutes to ensure adherence to the requirements.

NCC maintains robust systems for both new faculty mentorship and ongoing professional development for non-probationary faculty. The onboarding process is structured and supportive. Upon hiring, each new faculty member is assigned mentors for a three-year period. During this time, new faculty collaborate with their immediate supervisor and mentors to develop a Professional Development Plan (PDP), which is formally reviewed within six months of the hire date.

For non-probationary faculty, the focus shifts to a three-year PDP designed to continuously improve instructional competencies and/or knowledge of their field or technical areas. This continuing professional development is a key component of the faculty evaluation process. Faculty members record their development activities and submit an annual log to human resources.

Recommendations: Iowa Code refers to "faculty" and does not differentiate among types of faculty classifications (e.g. adjunct, CE, full-time, part-time). NCC invites adjunct faculty to participate in professional development but does not document nor require their participation. The Department team **recommends** that NCC establish a system for both requiring and documenting adjunct professional development activities.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 8: Senior Year Plus Programs

There are a variety of requirements for Senior Year Plus (SYP) programs offered to high school students jointly enrolled in Iowa's community colleges. These requirements are included in Iowa Code 261E. The Department utilizes the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) accreditation process to ensure compliance with statutory requirements.

The Department team reviewed desk review materials and conducted assurance interviews related to compliance with the SYP state standard. NCC's latest NACEP re-accreditation was approved with no major areas of improvement required. NCC is accredited with NACEP through 2026-2027. NCC, however, has opted to utilize the new Department SYP evaluation tool to ensure concurrent enrollment standards are being met, so will be discontinuing NACEP accreditation.

NCC's concurrent enrollment program, College for You, provides SYP programming to 17 school districts. Program staff coordinate and monitor programming within the NCC service area. Their work ensures continuity of SYP program processes and procedures and includes the use of faculty liaisons to confirm the rigor of programming offered within the area high schools is aligned with courses taught on the college campus.

The Department team was impressed by NCC's commitment to improving their SYP program and support for students. Noteworthy examples include:

- Providing thorough, detailed and clear handbooks for concurrent enrollment faculty, students and parents.
- Planning regional center locations to eliminate travel barriers and ensure all students in NCC's region have access to college credit opportunities.
- Improving outreach and building relationships with homeschool/dual enrollment students.
- Providing weekly enrollment rosters to school districts to verify enrollment and billing.
- Training students in each district on the college's learning management system.
- Delivering career exploration presentations to eighth grade students to develop career pathways understanding, create an advising relationship and ease student transition prior to high school.
- Developing district course listing documents for students.

Recommendations: The Department team **recommends** that the college develop a process for communication with the district in the event an approved concurrent enrollment teacher has a long hiatus, is replaced or has their license suspended or revoked, and that this process is added to the SYP contracts and handbooks so each district is aware of their responsibility.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Standard 9: Student Services

Community Colleges must provide a program of student services to meet the needs of students as outlined in Iowa Administrative Code 281 subsection 21.62(9). This program will include a systematic onboarding process, programs and resources on financing college, a student-centered advising program, campus safety and security and opportunities to supplement classroom learning.

The Department team conducted a desk review to evaluate NCC's student services programs and staffing. During the site visit, the Department team conducted assurance interviews with faculty, students and staff to further understand the college's student services program and their communication and engagement approaches with students to ensure compliance with this standard. The Department team identified evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a breadth of services in order to foster a safe and welcome environment for students from recruitment and onboarding, to a safe and secure campus with programs and staff to assist students on their path to their career and academic goals. The Department team commends NCC's commitment to the success of all students through the services they provide including:

- Assigning program-specific advisors dedicated to providing a personalized student experience.
- Utilizing the "EdReady" tool and corequisite remediation processes to help students complete college-level math and English courses in a timely manner.
- Requiring students to meet with college staff prior to dropping a course so students understand if the implications of these decisions are made in their best interests.
- Ensuring all catalogs, handbooks and manuals that provide information to students and families are detailed, informative and easy to comprehend.
- Offering a robust orientation program and student onboarding process.
- Providing a learning center with multiple resources for students.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Continuous Improvement Special Topic

The comprehensive evaluation includes a continuous improvement component which is referred to as the “special topic.” The college identifies a special topic that aligns with an area it has identified for continuous improvement. The Department provides technical assistance during the site visit to support the college’s continuous improvement initiative. Generally, a panel of peer-college subject matter experts is convened to answer questions, offer best practice examples and suggest feedback on the continuous improvement initiative. The resulting dialogue is intended to facilitate consultative advice that is valuable to the college’s continuous improvement process.

NCC identified transfer majors as an area for continuous improvement and submitted a list of topics and questions that they wanted to learn more about from their peer institutions. The Department team facilitated a virtual roundtable entitled “Transfer Majors in Practice: Local Implementation, Student Experience and Collaboration.” The session focused on three primary objectives: enhancing inter-departmental collaboration, establishing clear transfer pathways for students and implementing robust engagement strategies to ensure student success. NCC administrators, staff and faculty engaged with representatives from Iowa Central Community College, Hawkeye Community College and Western Iowa Tech Community College to identify actionable improvements for NCC’s transfer major initiatives.

Key highlights of the presentation include:

- Seamless secondary integration: Integrating high school concurrent enrollment into transfer pathways through collaborative program design, unified advising supports and shared digital platforms.
- Holistic student support: Improving the transfer experience by fostering a sense of belonging, expanding access to high-impact opportunities and ensuring transparent financial aid communication.
- Institutional alignment and growth: Driving transfer momentum by formalizing institutional partnerships, engaging cross-disciplinary faculty in curricular alignment and providing targeted professional development for staff.

The Department team commends NCC for identifying an opportunity to improve its transfer student outcomes by selecting transfer major initiatives as its accreditation continuous improvement special topic.

STICS Curriculum Review

The Department utilizes the State of Iowa Curriculum System (STICS) web-based platform for its program approval process and maintains a database of approved programs and courses. STICS performs compliance checks on all programs offered by each college. Iowa Administrative Code subsection 281-21.3(2) offers further information.

The Department team conducted a compliance check of NCC’s programs to ensure they meet state requirements. The review compared NCC’s approved programs in the state’s database with those listed in the college catalog. The Department team identified minimal misalignments between the college catalog and STICS. There were no instances of any programs being out of compliance in regards to technical core, general education or credit hour requirements. The college has agreed to make the edits and the Department team anticipates completion in a timely manner.

NCC has sound, robust curriculum practices in place. All curriculum proposals originate within the academic department or discipline, follow an internal approval process and conclude with the curriculum committee review and approval. After changes are approved by the curriculum committee, the new or existing program changes are submitted to the state for approval.

Finding: No accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Compliance with Non-Accreditation State or Federal Requirements

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Department Team Recommendation

The Department of Education community college accreditation team recommends continued accreditation for Northwest Iowa Community College.

A state interim accreditation evaluation is scheduled for AY 30-31.