

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

June 18, 2026

Agenda Item: North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC)
Accreditation Report

**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.

Presenter(s): Robin Shaffer Lilienthal, Administrative Consultant
Bureau of Community Colleges

Joel Pedersen, President
North Iowa Area Community College

Attachment(s): One

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

Background: As mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47, the Bureau of Community Colleges conducted the comprehensive accreditation evaluation of NIACC. The Department team and two external reviewers conducted a desk review, outcomes benchmark review and assurance interviews to evaluate NIACC. The attached report reflects the results of the comprehensive evaluation, which included a site visit on January 29-30, 2026.

Accreditation Report Comprehensive State Evaluation

North Iowa Area Community College

Site Visit: January 29-30, 2026

Presented to the Iowa State Board of Education: June 18, 2026



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

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Accreditation Review Team Members

Amy Gieseke

Administrator, Division of Higher Education and Postsecondary Readiness
Iowa Department of Education

Robin Shaffer Lilienthal

Administrative Consultant for Community Colleges
Iowa Department of Education

Heather Meissen

Administrative Consultant for CTE
Iowa Department of Education

Derreck Calkins

Education Program Consultant for Program Quality and Faculty Support
Iowa Department of Education

Rochelle Duwa

Education Program Consultant for Business Education and CTSOs

Kelly Friesleben

Education Program Consultant for Student Success
Iowa Department of Education

Lisa Washington

Education Program Consultant for Senior Year Plus
Iowa Department of Education

Rochelle Green

Photography & Digital Arts Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor
Iowa Central Community College

Megan Mohrhauser

Coordinator of Accreditation and Compliance
Des Moines Area Community College

Scott Schultz

Executive Academic Dean, Math & Science, Agriculture, Animal, & Natural Resources
Des Moines Area Community College

Purpose of the State Evaluation

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

Institutional Overview and Outcomes Profile

NIACC encompasses all of Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Franklin, Hancock, Mitchell, Winnebago and Worth counties and parts of Butler, Wright, Kossuth and Chickasaw counties county in north central Iowa and is bordered by Minnesota. NIACC's service area has a total population of 130,000 and is governed by an elected nine-member board of directors who represent separate districts. NIACC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission.

NIACC was formed in 1966 in compliance with laws enacted by the 1965 Iowa Legislature, which provided for the delivery of postsecondary education in Iowa. The NIACC board of directors assumed operation of Mason City Junior College (MCJC), which was established as the first public two-year college in Iowa and by the Mason City Independent School District. MCJC was the first two-year college founded west of the Mississippi River.

On September 9, 1918, MCJC opened its doors in the newly built Mason City High School building to 28 students with six teachers offering five fields of study. MCJC's pre-baccalaureate curriculum was designed to encourage further study on the part of high school graduates as well as to offer higher education to those students who might have otherwise been unable to afford it.

As with all colleges nationwide, World War II caused enrollments and program offerings to decrease in the early 1940s, but after the war enrollment climbed as service men and women took advantage of the G.I. Bill to further their education. In 1947, the college began a program in adult education for teacher training and recertification. By 1948, noncredit adult education classes became popular and summer school for teachers was offered. The 1960s saw the addition of vocational-technical programs and by 1966, enrollment increased to more than 1,700 credit students.

In 1966, the statewide organization of areas to maintain and operate community colleges or technical institutions resulted in the election of a board to direct the college who represented 34 school districts. This board named the institution North Iowa Area Community College. The new community college added two new programs in agriculture and nursing and opened new buildings to accommodate vocational-technical programs. By 1974, NIACC reached an enrollment of 2,000 students. The momentum of growth continued during the 1980s and 1990s as NIACC continued to expand and offer services, activities and clubs of interest to students. NIACC currently offers 67 career programs, transfer programs for a bachelor's degree and an array of continuing education opportunities for professional and personal growth.

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, NIACC enrolled 3,317 credit students which includes 27% enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) programs; 48.9% concurrent enrollment; and 948 degrees, diplomas, and certificates conferred. The college also enrolled 11,384 noncredit students which includes 60.8% enrolled in CTE programs, 6.4% transferring to credit education after noncredit completion and 380 adult basic education students.

The Department team reviewed outcomes in key areas related to student success, CTE programs 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 in comparison, to national community college benchmarks. NIACC's highlighted outcomes include:

- Two-year completion rates improved from 41.8% in 2020 to 51.4% in 2024 and six-year rates moved from 45.2% in 2020 to 49.6% in 2024.
- Student success rates at the end of year two improved from 52.8% in 2020 to 64.4% in 2024 and the end of year six rates moved from 64.9% in 2020 to 67.6% in 2024.

- Transfer rates have improved 2% from 2020 to 2024.
- CTE associate degrees were received by 38.3% of students which leads both national and state benchmarks.
- Students who needed developmental math became college ready (88.0%) at rates exceeding state (58.6%) and national (41.1%) benchmarks.
- Students reaching credit threshold expectations improved from 55.7% in 2020 to 64.3% in 2024 which exceeds both state (54.6%) and national (46.1%) benchmarks.

The Department team found no evidence of 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 NIACC that included a desk review of written materials submitted by the college, review of annual outcomes data and on-site assurance interviews conducted on January 29-30, 2026.

The Department team was impressed with many aspects of the college including:

- Focus on the student as a "whole person" which is evidenced by "The Student Is" cards attached to employee identification badges, noncredit and credit students receiving the same access to all opportunities, a student feedback panel during the annual board of director's retreat and a leadership development program called the "NIACC Lead Academy."
- High quality programs organized around meta majors, career pathways and transfer majors where no student has an undeclared program.
- College operates collaboratively as a community rather than with a "top down" approach which is demonstrated by soliciting and valuing input from students, faculty and staff in decision-making.

Standards for Accreditation

Prior State Evaluation

The 2021 Interim State Evaluation Report identified a finding in Standard 3 Special Needs and Protected Classes related to the prominence, completeness and consistency of the continuous nondiscrimination statement. Another finding was identified in Standard 5 Facilities, Parking Lots and Roads that related to the timing of the board of directors' approval for the facilities master plan. The Department team verified at the time that NIACC had fulfilled both of its follow-up requirements.

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Department team conducted a desk review of the college's HLC materials and conducted an assurance interview related to the HLC visit. HLC conducted NIACC's Reaffirmation of Accreditation in fall 2023. The HLC review team noted "NIACC is a well-rounded institution that meets all of the Criteria for Accreditation." The college's next Assurance Review is scheduled for July 2028 and the next Reaffirmation of Accreditation will occur during the 2033-2034 cycle.

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 NIACC a random list of 20 faculty members who taught credit courses during the previous year. The college submitted documentation of qualifications for these faculty, including supporting materials such as college transcripts, employment applications to illustrate related work experience and third-party licenses or certifications, 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). 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 prior to the onsite visit to review NIACC's Americans with Disabilities Act and nondiscrimination policies, statements, and practices available in marketing and recruitment publications, handbooks, the college catalog, the college website and a sample of course syllabi. During the site visit, the team reviewed additional documentation and conducted assurance interviews with faculty, students and staff associated with student special needs and disabilities services to ensure compliance with this standard. While on site, the Department team saw evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students, deliver accommodations for students with special needs and provide opportunities for underrepresented students in particular programs of study. The Department team commends NIACC's commitment to the success of all students. A sample of evidence includes:

- Creating an opportunity for students with intellectual disabilities to engage with each other and the greater NIACC community through the EDUCATE program. This club provides opportunities for connection, support and involvement by helping students build relationships, develop skills and feel a stronger sense of belonging on campus.
- Offering a wide variety of clubs and organizations to meet students' needs and provide opportunities to get involved on campus.
- Ensuring that students and staff knew that Lisa Vance and Rachel McGuire were the contacts for accommodations and grievances/complaints respectively. Students seemed to understand the process and where to access information.
- Facilitating strong community partnerships to outreach and support students and their families through FAFSA nights and financial aid information.
- Using the NAVIGATE system to share information about student communication and outreach to meet student needs.

Finding: During the desk review, the Department team noted that the *annual notice of nondiscrimination* was missing required elements including a) the limited English proficiency statement,

b) the contact information of the Title IX Coordinator for students and c) the complete list of all CTE programs with a notation for the CTE programs with specific admissions criteria. In addition, the college website lacks a translation option for reading the annual notice of nondiscrimination in languages other than English. NIACC should update the annual notice of nondiscrimination to include the required missing information and update its website to include a translation option.

In addition, during the desk review and site visit, the Department team also noted that the *continuous notice of nondiscrimination* was missing required information and inconsistent across all publication locations including a) some instances where only a link to the website was posted rather than the full continuous notice language (e.g. course syllabi, college catalog), b) the font size used in the text was too small to read on several marketing materials and c) there were some instances where the continuous notice was labeled as the annual notice (e.g. faculty handbook, concurrent enrollment instructor and faculty liaison handbooks). NIACC should review and update all instances of the continuous nondiscrimination notices to ensure they meet the requirements. The Department team also suggests that NIACC use generic contact information in their continuous notice of nondiscrimination to ensure consistency and prevent misinformation should nondiscrimination staff members change.

To verify compliance, the Department team will review, by August 2026, the annual notice of nondiscrimination on NIACC's website to ensure all required information is correctly included for AY 26-27. The college will also conduct a review of their continuous notice of nondiscrimination postings to ensure they meet all of the required elements. The Department will review a sampling of published materials to ensure compliance with continuous notice language in November 2026.

Standard 4: Career and Technical Education Program 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% of their CTE programs annually.

The Department team conducted a desk review and assurance interview related to NIACC's CTE program review process including a sampling of past CTE program reviews and the schedule for conducting reviews. The Department team also reviewed a random sample of CTE advisory committee materials to ensure compliance with standards related to advisory committee composition, roles and responsibilities.

The Department team identified that NIACC reviews CTE programs every five years, however, until recently did not review 20% of programs each year as required by *Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-46*. The college utilizes a comprehensive program review manual to guide program faculty members through the program review process. This manual list key terminology and outlines the different types and roles of faculty and staff who participate in the review. During the program review process, faculty members are provided data such as demographic information, program persistence, enrollment, retention and completion data and grade point average summary data. Program faculty use this information to answer questions outlined in a program review template. After the program review process is complete, faculty members in the program present components of the review to and receive constructive feedback from the Program/Discipline Review Committee.

The Department team was impressed with the following practices related to program review at NIACC:

- The program review process thoroughly addresses the standard related to the program yielding a positive return on investment for students. Through template questions, program faculty members analyze program costs in relation to student costs and consider changes to the program that assist students in overcoming financial barriers.
- The college "closes the loop" on program review through annual meetings with faculty members and deans to discuss strengths and opportunities for growth in the program and the achievement of program goals including a summary of actions from the last program review.

- The college strategic planning efforts are focused on providing area high school students access to community college CTE programming within a 30-minute drive. A new regional center in Hampton expands access in that area to CTE coursework, industry-recognized credentials and community college awards.
- Several types of work-based learning experiences are embedded into CTE programs including internship and the related training instruction components of apprenticeship opportunities in several programs in partnership with several northern Iowa businesses.
- The college strives to ensure that there is a variety of representation on advisory councils including different workplace settings, sectors and business sizes. Some councils include current and previous students and high school instructors.
- Advisory council feedback informs changes to programs which are based on committee discussion and the Developing a Curriculum model for curriculum changes including reviewing skills needed in industry against skills taught in the curriculum to identify gaps and relevancy.
- Students can access several CTE-related career and technical student organizations and other co-curricular opportunities including HOSA-Future Health Professionals, SkillsUSA, Carpentry Student Association and Cybersecurity Defense Club.

Recommendations: Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-46 states that each community college will establish a process to ensure that at least 20% of CTE programs are reviewed annually. Based on the desk review evidence NIACC's CTE programs were being reviewed every five years, but 20% of programs were not being reviewed each year. The college revised its CTE program review schedule in fall 2025 to ensure that 20% of programs are reviewed each year. The Department team **recommends** that NIACC continue to use a program review schedule that maintains compliance with Iowa's administrative rules.

Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281-46 requires that the CTE program review process includes specific components including the disaggregation of student outcomes data by Perkins special population groups. The Department team **recommends** that NIACC work with Department staff to ensure that student outcomes data is disaggregated and reviewed. Another component of the program review process includes assessing if the general education curriculum is aligned with program outcomes. NIACC informally assesses the general education curriculum through the alignment of student learning outcomes, program learning outcomes and institutional learning outcomes. The Department team **recommends** that the college formalize this assessment by incorporating additional questions related to the alignment of the general education curriculum with program outcomes into the program review template.

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

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 related to compliance with the facilities, parking lots and roads state standard. NIACC's most recent facilities plan was approved by the college's board of directors in September 2024 and complies with state standards. A campus tour was conducted during the site visit. The Department team was impressed with NIACC's dedication to improving the physical plant and technology infrastructure for students, staff and community including:

- The board's annual retreat hosts a panel of students who are invited to discuss their suggestions for how to improve the campus. The students' suggestions and concerns are not only noted, but addressed.
- Every classroom is supplied with standardized equipment, including remote locations and regional centers, to ensure students and faculty have access to standard equipment regardless of class location.
- Student-focused gathering spaces are located throughout campus where students can collaborate and have access to faculty.

- Safety is prioritized through security cameras, overnight dorm security coverage and trainings on cybersecurity, active shooter, mental health and hazing topics.

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 NIACC'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 impressive outcomes including student success benchmarks and credit and noncredit enrollment rates within its region.
- A continuous cycle of planning, assessing and improving is employed using data.
- Strategic planning initiatives and achievements are communicated using methods such as annual reports presented to the board of directors, communication with external stakeholders and data dashboards which illustrate both current and historical data.
- Institutional Research Collaborative with Iowa Central Community College and Iowa Lakes Community College promotes sharing resources, ideas and knowledge to leverage data information, reporting consistency and accessing grants.

Recommendation: During the desk review, the Department team noticed a gap in active strategic plans. The prior plan was in effect 2018-2023. During the site visit assurance interview, the Department team asked the college to explain its strategic planning cycle. The college shared that a "revisited" plan to extend the previous plan until 2025 in order to give their new president an opportunity to develop a new strategic plan was discussed with the board of directors and approved in October 2022. The college explained that they were currently undergoing a new strategic planning process. The timing leaves the college without a board-approved current strategic plan since June 2025. The Department team recognizes the effort to give the new president an opportunity to provide leadership over the new strategic plan, however, the "revisited" plan extension expired in June leaving the college without an active strategic plan. The Department team **recommends** that the college ensure a five-year strategic plan is in effect to maintain compliance with Iowa's administrative rule even during leadership transition periods in the future.

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 NIACC'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.

NIACC maintains a robust QFP that is overseen by a collaborative committee of faculty and administrators. To ensure the plan remains current and compliant with state standards, it is updated annually and formally approved by the board of directors, with meeting minutes confirming this consistent oversight.

The QFP mandates a structured development pathway for all credit-bearing instructors, beginning with a comprehensive probationary period for new faculty. Once faculty move beyond probationary status, the focus shifts toward long-term career development through an annual Continuing Professional Development Plan (CPDP). Full-time faculty are required to engage in activities across three specific domains: teaching methodology, content expertise, and college service. This ensures that experienced educators continue to evolve alongside institutional and student needs.

Similarly, the Quality Adjunct Plan (QAP) provides a focused framework for part-time instructors to maintain high instructional standards. Following their initial year, adjunct faculty continue their professional growth by submitting an annual QAP that targets teaching methodology and discipline-specific expertise. These plans require at least one approved activity per category and are further supported by mandatory participation in professional development meetings during active teaching semesters, ensuring a cohesive standard of excellence across the entire instructional staff.

NIACC maintains the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) which coordinates a variety of professional development opportunities. These include 13 dedicated professional development days held during the weeks leading up to the fall and spring semesters, as well as three additional days at the end of the spring semester. In addition, professional development sessions are offered on the second and fourth Mondays throughout each semester. CETL engages faculty through the professional development advisory board to identify training topics and disseminates student feedback on instruction through panels and surveys.

NIACC also funds several external professional development opportunities for faculty including ACUE membership and ACUE Commons, Quality Matters, access to individual funding for content area conference attendance and other training opportunities, certification training for industry-recognized credential administration, professional organization membership and tuition reimbursement for additional coursework.

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

Promising Practice Profile

The Department team identified a promising practice within the QFP standard as an exemplary model for training new and adjunct faculty. NIACC provides a comprehensive new faculty onboarding program and fully engages its adjunct faculty to ensure quality instruction across all types of instructors and experience levels. Examples include:

- Providing a two-week, paid orientation program for new faculty prior to the first faculty contract day.
- Requiring instructional competency training based on college's core instructional standards taught through Canvas New Faculty Onboarding course and the New Adjunct Onboarding course during the first year.
- Striving to limit the number of different course preparations for new faculty.
- Sponsoring a mentoring program for new faculty and monthly cohort meetings to offer support and touchpoints.
- Designing the QAP to include structured onboarding, professional development opportunities and training for quality adjunct instruction.
- Onboarding first year adjuncts through the "Growing with Canvas" course and collaborating with an assigned liaison and their program dean to acclimate to the college's expectations.
- Engaging adjunct faculty, including concurrent enrollment faculty, in grade-norming exercises to ensure consistency across like course offerings.

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 chapter 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. Through the desk review process, the Department team noted that NIACC's latest NACEP re-accreditation application was not initially approved and required additional documentation for three standard areas. As requested, NIACC provided further documentation to NACEP's Reconsideration Review Team, who found the evidence required for meeting the standard areas, so it approved the college for re-accreditation through 2025-2026. NIACC is currently in the process of accreditation renewal.

NIACC's concurrent enrollment program, Career Link, provides SYP programming to 18 school districts. Career Link staff coordinate and monitor programming within the NIACC service area. This 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 with the effective procedures NIACC has implemented to improve communication, offer intentional advising, ensure successful completion of courses and provide pathway planning for students.

- NIACC has eight College and Career Transition Counselors assigned to all but two school districts including alternative high schools.
- SYP students are encouraged to utilize all student support services and are issued student IDs.
- Students are offered a customized "College with Confidence" campus visit, to sit in on face-to-face NIACC classes and tour the campus.
- Concurrent enrollment high school faculty have mandatory training each semester covering general and discipline-specific sessions.
- Grade-norming activities are held among full-time and concurrent enrollment faculty.
- Faculty Liaisons participate in workshops to improve their leadership and advising skills.
- Districts must follow the college academic calendar, even for those courses that take place within the high school.
- NIACC 2025 concurrent enrollment data includes:
 - 1,755 students from 18 school districts
 - 18,031 credits
 - 10.3 credits per student
 - 31.7% of students in high school service area enroll in concurrent enrollment
 - 51.4% of all students are jointly enrolled
 - 33.7% of all credit hours are jointly enrolled
 - 219 awards completed

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 prior to reviewing NIACC's programs, staffing, experiences related to student services and how they are implemented and communicated to students. During the site visit, the Department team conducted assurance interviews with faculty, students and staff to ensure compliance with this standard. While on site, the Department team saw evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a breadth of services in order to foster a safe and welcoming 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. A sample of evidence includes:

- Using the Navigate 360 tool to communicate with students in order to both provide outreach and to receive feedback on ways to improve student services.
- Developing a partnership with local health clinics so students can use a NIACC voucher to cover the cost of a visit when sick.
- Offering wrap-around services to address the many needs of students including a food pantry, a clothing closet and a wellness hub that allows for a nurse and licensed counselor to meet with students on campus.

- Creating a Family Hub as a dedicated way to share information with students' family members.

The Department team commends NIACC's commitment to the success of all students through the services they provide.

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.

NIACC identified adult learners 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 "Increasing Adult Student Enrollment." The session focused on four primary areas: understanding who adult learners are and why they are important; programs and services to offer for adult learners; policy and practice considerations; and how to engage external partners and stakeholders. NIACC administrators, staff and faculty engaged with representatives from Hawkeye Community College and Northeast Iowa Community College to identify actionable improvements for NIACC's adult student initiatives.

Key highlights of the presentation include:

- Information was provided to help the college understand adult learner unique needs and supports, goals and motivations, communication expectations and relationships, especially regarding their importance to the institution and community.
- Institutional strategies that create an academic culture and structure to support adult learners were presented, including aligning curriculum with career advancement, matching educational format to lifestyle realities, and aligning institutional value with student aspirations.
- Policies and practices can either create barriers or provide protections for adult learners, so should be reviewed and discussed prior to seeking to recruit additional adult students. Example policies and practices include: enrollment restrictions for adult classes, scheduling, faculty qualifications, access to course materials and support services and transfer credit.
- Panelists discussed the need to engage external partners with strategies to help facilitate an environment within the community that encourages adults to pursue additional education and training including: building opportunities around worker needs, communicating the mutual benefit for investing in adult learners, providing outreach and hosting events for connection and communication.

The Department team commends NIACC for identifying an opportunity to improve its student outcomes by selecting adult learner 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.

NIACC has sound, robust curriculum practices in place. All curriculum proposals originate within the department or discipline. After all approvals have been obtained, proposals are placed on the curriculum committee agenda for approval. When the changes are approved by the curriculum committee the new or existing program changes are submitted to the state for approval.

The Department team identified no instances of any programs being out of compliance in regards to technical core, general education or credit hour requirements. The Department team identified minimal misalignments

between the college catalog and STICS, and the college has agreed to make the edits. The Department team anticipates completion in a timely manner.

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 North Iowa Area Community College.

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

