

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

August 3, 2023



- Agenda Item:** Northwest Area Education Agency
Paraeducator Preparation Program Approval
- State Board Priority:** Improving Teacher and Leader Preparation
- State Board Role/Authority:** Iowa Administrative Code section 281—80 grants authority to the State Board of Education to set standards and procedures for the approval of programs for individuals who seek a paraeducator certification issued by the Board of Educational Examiners.
- Presenter(s):** Kelly Faga, Consultant
Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness
- Attachment(s):** One
- Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board approve the Northwest Area Education Agency Paraeducator Preparation Program through the next review scheduled for the 2030-2031 academic year.
- Background:** Northwest Area Education Agency has submitted a request for approval of the paraeducator generalist certification, early childhood (prekindergarten through grade 3), English as a second language (prekindergarten through grade 12), school library media (prekindergarten through grade 12) and autism spectrum disorders. Upon review of the evidence, it is determined that Northwest

Area Education Agency has met each of the program standard requirements in IAC 281-80, and has submitted the appropriate curriculum exhibits to meet the Board of Educational Examiners Requirements in IAC 282-24.



Northwest Area Education Agency Paraeducator Preparation Program Report

Board Report 2023

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

State Board of Education

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Review Team Members

Dr. Kelly Faga, Iowa Department of Education

Ms. Geri McMahon, Iowa Board of Educational Examiners

Recommendation to the Board

Program	Recommendation
Generalist Certificate	Approval
Early Childhood (prekindergarten through grade 3)	Approval
English as a Second Language (prekindergarten through grade 12)	Approval
School Library Media (prekindergarten through grade 12)	Approval
Autism Spectrum Disorder	Approval

The report includes a selected summary of suggestions for improvements and compliance concerns for each area. A copy of the program application with links to evidence of compliance is maintained in Iowa Department of Education (Department) files and copies are available upon request.

Program Representative

Judy Sweetman, Educational Consultant, License Renewal Coordinator

A Brief History/Overview Shared by the Program

Northwest Area Education Agency's (NWAEA) mission is to provide visionary leadership and quality, student-centered services through relationships with families, schools and communities. One integral service NWAEA provides for Iowa is comprehensive training for paraeducators. NWAEA, formerly Western Hills AEA, has offered this program for over 25 years.

At its inception, paraeducator training was offered to the Sioux City School District. A few years later, the offering expanded to rural school districts. Because of the high demand, the training was then available AEA-wide at NWAEA. Early on, an Early Childhood concentration was added for certified paraeducators to earn renewal credits.

In the last five years, approximately 332 paraeducators have earned their generalist certification. In the same time span, 16 paraeducators have earned their Early Childhood concentration. Also, in the past five years, three additional concentrations have been added: Autism, Library Media and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Paraeducators receive training in the foundations of what it means to be a paraeducator, applying instructional strategies and methods to help students manage their behavior. The paraeducator program is an important component in implementing NWAEA's mission.

Program Standards

281—80.9 Organizational and Resources Standard

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

80.9(1) The unit provides resources and support necessary for the delivery of a quality certification program, including:

- a) A commitment to a work culture, policies and faculty/staff assignments that promote and support best practices in education;
- b) Resources to support a quality hands-on (clinical) experience;
- c) Resources to support professional development opportunities for certified paraeducators and unit faculty;
- d) Resources to support technological and instructional needs to enhance candidate learning; and
- e) A commitment of sufficient administrative, clerical and technical staff to ensure implementation of a quality program.

80.9(2) The unit provides evidence of collaboration with members of the professional community, including the unit's advisory committee comprised of school administrators, classroom teachers, currently employed paraprofessionals and others, to design, deliver and evaluate programs to prepare paraeducators.

80.9(3) When a unit is a part of a college or university, the unit maintains ongoing collaboration with the appropriate departments of the institution, especially regarding content knowledge.

80.9(4) The unit has primary responsibility for all paraeducator preparation programs offered through any delivery model.

80.9(5) The unit has a clearly articulated appeals process for decisions affecting candidates. This process is communicated to all candidates and staff. The unit may use an institution wide appeals process to meet the requirements of this subrule.

80.9(6) The unit's use of staff in teaching roles is purposeful and managed to ensure integrity, quality and continuity of the program(s).

80.9(7) The unit ensures that resources are equitable for all program components, regardless of delivery or location.

Standard Met

The Organizational and Resources Standard has been met by NWAEA. NWAEA offers a variety of professional development opportunities for all educators, including paraeducator candidates. NWAEA offered 109 unique courses during the 2021-2022 school year with a total of 972 sections. Paraeducators may take these courses for license renewal or as a candidate. The courses included a wide variety of topics, including Substitute Authorization, paraeducator training, Social-Emotional-Behavioral Health (SEBH), Autism Spectrum Disorder, crucial conversations, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), science of reading and building numeracy. Certified paraeducators can also earn additional certification in Early Childhood, Autism, Library Media and Information Technology, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Substitute Authorization.

Compliance Concerns

None.

281—80.10 Diversity Standard

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

80.10(1) The unit provides an environment and experiences to paraeducator candidates to support candidate growth in knowledge, skills and dispositions to help diverse groups of PK-12 students learn.

80.10(2) The unit establishes and maintains a climate that promotes and supports diversity.

80.10(3) The unit's plans, policies and practices document its efforts in establishing and maintaining a diverse staff and paraeducator candidate pool that strives to represent the diverse makeup of the community at large.

80.10(4) In addition to the requirements of rule 281—80.12, the unit shall gather data about its implementation of this rule, use those data to make program improvements and share those data and improvements with the schools and communities it serves.

Standard Met

NWAEA has met the Diversity Standard through providing an environment that supports candidate growth in knowledge, skills and dispositions to help serve diverse groups of PK-12 learners. Candidates, in Paraeducator 1, learn to recognize the different developmental stages of students. They are asked to recognize their own personal biases and beliefs regarding student abilities to learn, and to engage in the mindset that every learner has growth potential. Candidates read an article by Melissa Kelly, "*Avoiding Teacher Bias and Erroneous Beliefs*", and watch the video, *I'm Tyler*. Following the preparatory materials, candidates complete an assignment regarding factors that promote learning and strategies to determine student abilities, rather than focusing on a diagnosis.

Compliance Concerns

None.

281—80.11 Faculty Standard

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

80.11(1) The unit documents the alignment of teaching duties for each faculty member with that member's preparation, knowledge, experiences and skills appropriate for training paraeducators to serve in a school setting.

80.11(2) The institution shall hold unit staff accountable for teaching the critical concepts and principles of the discipline.

80.11(3) For the purpose of implementing each of the requirements of this chapter, unit faculty shall maintain ongoing, actual involvement in settings where paraeducators are employed.

Standard Met

NWAEA has met the Faculty Standard. NWAEA employs two, highly qualified, instructors for the three paraeducator generalist classes. Instructors have their Iowa teaching licenses with multiple endorsements. Faculty are observed at least once during their evaluation year. Additionally, instructors are evaluated every three years for teaching prowess using the eight Iowa Teaching Standards. Both paraeducator instructors spend significant time in K-12 settings where paraeducators are employed.

Compliance Concerns

None.

281—80.12 Program Assessment and Evaluation Standard

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

80.12(1) Each paraeducator candidate's knowledge and skills shall be measured against state certification standards adopted by the board of educational examiners under Iowa Code section 272.12 and the unit's learning outcomes for any certificate for which the unit may recommend the candidate.

80.12(2) Programs shall submit curriculum exhibits for approval by the department.

80.12(3) The unit shall establish a standard of satisfactory performance of paraeducator candidates, which shall comply with the following requirements.

- a) The unit uses measures for candidate assessment that are fair, reliable and valid.
- b) The unit assesses candidates on their demonstration and attainment of unit standards.
- c) The unit uses a variety of assessment measures for assessment of candidates on each unit standard.
- d) The unit provides candidates with formative feedback on their progress toward attainment of unit standards.
- e) The unit assesses content knowledge and its application as candidates work with students, teachers, parents and other professional colleagues in school settings.
- f) The unit assesses candidates at the same level of performance across programs, regardless of the place or manner in which the program is delivered.

80.12(4) The unit shall conduct a survey of graduates and their employers to ensure that its graduates are well prepared for their assigned roles.

80.12(5) The unit shall have a clearly defined, cohesive assessment system and regularly review, analyze and revise its assessment practices.

80.12(6) The unit shall collect and analyze aggregated candidate and program data, use those data to make program improvements and share those data and improvements with stakeholders on a regular basis.

80.12(7) An annual report including a composite of evaluative data collected by the unit shall be submitted to the department by September 30 of each year.

80.12(8) When it publicly reports data, the unit shall comply with all applicable privacy laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.

Standard Met

NWAEA has developed an assessment system that meets the Assessment and Evaluations Standard criteria. A survey is sent to every participant in the paraeducator courses. The survey summary shows the percentage of participants who took the survey, participant perceptions on preparedness and suggestions for program improvement. The survey data is discussed at NWAEA advisory committee meetings for continuous improvement purposes. The program seeks input and implementation suggestions from multiple stakeholders.

Compliance Concerns

None.

281—80.13 Clinical Practice Standard

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

80.13(1) Paraeducator clinical experiences support learning in the context in which paraeducators will practice.

80.13(2) Paraeducator clinical experiences include the following:

- a) A minimum of ten hours of experience in a state-approved school or educational facility under the supervision of a licensed educator.
- b) Opportunities for paraeducator candidates to observe and be observed by others in the application of skills and knowledge.

Standard Met

NWAEA has met the Clinical Standard through provided evidence. Candidates are monitored by a licensed teacher in the classroom(s) and observe classroom teachers throughout their clinical setting(s). Formative feedback is provided to the candidate from their classroom teacher.

Compliance Concerns

None.