

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

November 15, 2023



Agenda Item: Heartland 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 Iowa State Board of Education to set standards and procedures for the approval of programs for individuals who seek a paraeducator certification issued by the Bureau of Educational Examiners.

Presenter(s): Maryam Rod Szabo, Administrative Consultant
Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve the Heartland Area Education Agency Paraeducator Preparation Program through the next review scheduled for the 2030-2031 academic year.

Background: Heartland Area Education Agency has submitted a request for approval of the paraeducator generalist certification, early childhood (prekindergarten through grade 3), special needs (prekindergarten through grade 12), English as a second language (prekindergarten through grade 12) and school library media (prekindergarten through grade 12). Upon review of the evidence, it is determined that Heartland 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 Bureau of Educational Examiners requirements in IAC 282-24.

November 15, 2023



Heartland Area Education Agency Paraeducator Preparation Program Report

Iowa State Board of Education

November 15, 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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Division of Higher Education

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Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness

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Amy Gieseke, Section Chief
Maryam Rod Szabo, Administrative Consultant

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Review Team Members

Dr. Kelly Faga, Bureau of Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness

Geri McMahon, Bureau Educational Examiners

Recommendation to the Board

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

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

Program Representatives

Brandie Gean, Licensure and Conference Center Manager

A Brief History/Overview Shared by the Program

The purpose of Heartland Area Education Agency's (Heartland AEA) certification program for paraeducators is to empower and equip individuals working in Iowa schools with the necessary skills and knowledge to support teachers and enhance student learning. By offering professional learning opportunities and adhering to the competencies and standards set by the Department, Heartland AEA aims to build the capacity of paraeducators and enable them to provide essential individualized attention to students. Through their dedication and continuous successes, paraeducators serve as a vital link for teachers, unlocking the potential of students and creating opportunities for them to maximize their education. By becoming certified, paraeducators become well-prepared for employment, possess expertise in instructional and behavioral strategies, work with diverse student populations, adapt to various educational settings, foster professional relationships and uphold ethical responsibilities within the profession.

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. Heartland AEA provides resources to support professional development opportunities for certified paraeducators by offering continuing education in the generalist and concentration areas. Additionally, Heartland AEA provides paraeducators and course instructors technological resources, such as laptop computers, for checkout. Moreover, Heartland AEA's instructors incorporate opportunities for input from enrolled paraeducators, collect feedback at the culmination of each course and collaborate with their active advisory committee.

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

Heartland AEA has met the Diversity Standard through supporting candidates' growth in knowledge, skills and dispositions to help diverse groups of PK-12 students learn. In their generalist course they offer a unit on diversity where paraeducators build skills related to working with students who have a variety of abilities. The unit focuses on how to practice acceptance and understanding of all students. Additionally, Heartland AEA utilizes multiple media opportunities to publicize a wide range of professional development opportunities through Facebook, Twitter and monthly publication articles. Articles are shared through Administrator Connection and Educator Connection. Once articles are published, it is automatically shared on Twitter and Facebook, reaching numerous people including administrators, legislators, business and community leaders, local news media, board members and paraeducators.

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

Heartland AEA has met the Faculty Standard. Heartland AEA employs one staff member to teach the paraeducator courses and three areas of concentration. The instructor, professional learning coordinator and program administrator meet, as needed, to discuss policies, grades and resources. The paraeducator instructor is also employed as a consultant and works within schools. Heartland AEA created surveys for the institutions they serve to evaluate the effectiveness of the paraeducator program. These surveys are shared with Heartland AEA professional learning groups for their reflection, input and feedback.

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 bureau 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

Heartland AEA submitted curriculum exhibits for approval by the Department and has met the Assessment and Evaluation Standard. All assignments, journals and discussions are based on learning outcomes under Iowa Code section 272.12. Each lesson states what learning outcome will be taught and evaluated along with detailed instructions for the paraeducator. Every assignment includes a placeholder for the instructor to provide clarifying information related to the grade and how the participant can demonstrate improvements. At the conclusion of the generalist course, paraeducators are asked to complete a survey. Survey data is shared with the AEA Advisory Group, and key decisions are made utilizing the feedback.

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

Heartland AEA has met the Clinical Standard through requiring ten hours of experiences in a state-approved school. During each paraeducator course, participants complete a paraeducator partnership report where they journal or provide evidence of the conversations that occurred with their mentor teacher or administrator. The forms are shared with participants at the beginning of the course for students to utilize throughout the experience. Participants are required to address specific questions as outlined in the partnership report and document the discussions. They are observed by their mentor teacher or administrator within the district's classroom for a minimum of ten hours to sufficiently answer the conversation questions as outlined on the guided conversations form.

Compliance Concerns

None.