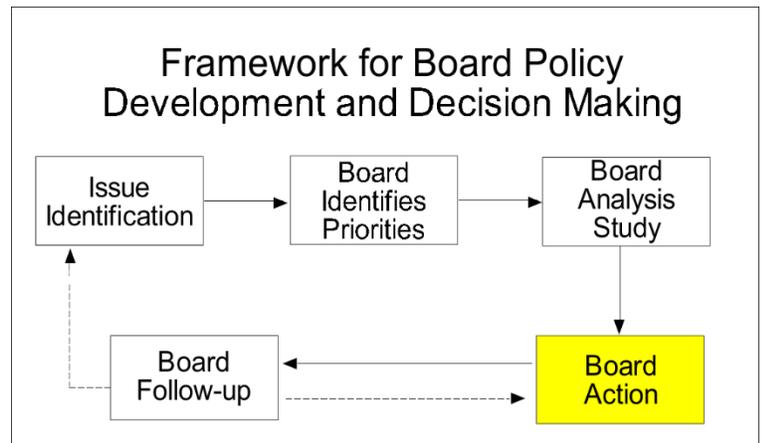


# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



**Agenda Item:** Grant Wood Area Education Agency (AEA) Accreditation Report

**State Board Priority:** Eliminating Achievement and Opportunity Gaps  
Improving Teacher and Leader Preparation

**State Board Role/Authority:** Iowa Code section 273.11 (1) directs the State Board to develop standards and rules for the accreditation of AEAs. The Department of Education is directed to develop and establish, in consultation with the AEAs, an accreditation process for AEAs. Iowa Code section 273.10 (1-3) states the State Board shall determine whether a program of an AEA shall receive initial accreditation or remain accredited...based upon the recommendation of the Director of the Department of Education after a study of the factual and evaluative evidence...in terms of the accreditation standards adopted by the State Board.

**Presenter(s):** Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant  
Bureau of School Improvement

**Attachment(s):** One

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation to Grant Wood AEA through the next review period.

**Background:**

Iowa Code section 273.10 requires the State Board to approve AEA accreditation for a term up to five years. The process requires the use of an accreditation team appointed by the Director of the Department of Education to conduct an evaluation, including an on-site visit of each AEA.

The AEA accreditation team shall determine whether the accreditation standards for a program have been met and shall make a report to the Director and the State Board, together with a recommendation as to whether the programs of the AEA should receive initial accreditation or remain accredited.

The accreditation team shall report strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each accreditation standard and shall advise the AEA of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance the strengths and improve areas of weakness.

# **Grant Wood Area Education Agency 2022 Accreditation Report**



October 12, 2022

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

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## Purpose

Iowa Code 273.10 defines the purpose of this report as determining if standards have been met, and making a recommendation to the Iowa State Board of Education (State Board) as to whether the programs of the area education agency (AEA) should receive initial accreditation, or remain accredited.

This recommendation is based on a desk audit review of documents and an on-site visit.

## Grant Wood AEA Service Area Data:

- 32 public school districts
- 24 nonpublic schools
- 77,136 students, preschool through grade 12
- 1 comprehensive school
- 59 targeted schools
- 501.25 total staff members
- Covers 4,294 square miles

## On-Site Visit:

Iowa Code 273.10 and Iowa Administrative Rule 281.72 require the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to conduct an AEA accreditation desk audit and visit to determine if the AEA is meeting accreditation standards listed below.

- School-Community Planning: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(a), 281 IAC 72.4(1)
- Professional Development: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(b), 281 IAC 72.4(2)
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(c), 281 IAC 72.4(3)
- Diverse Learners: Iowa Code 273.2(4)
- Media, Technology, Leadership, Multicultural/Gender Fair: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(f)(g), Iowa Code 273.4(2)
- Management Services: Iowa Code 273.7A

## School-Community Planning

This section includes how the AEA provides support for school-community planning, including a means of assessing needs, establishing shared direction and implementing program plans, and reporting progress. 281 IAC 72.9, Iowa Code 273.11, Iowa Code 273.11(2)(a), 281 IAC 72.4(1)

### A. Comprehensive Improvement Plan:

#### Strengths:

Grant Wood AEA utilizes multiple sources of data to develop and monitor their “Plan on a Page,” a comprehensive improvement plan that serves as a single reference point for their mission, core values and AEA goals.

As part of an AEA’s comprehensive improvement plan, they must implement services that respond to schools’ and school districts’ needs. To that end, school district special education directors identified AEA school improvement consultants who are a part of leadership teams within their districts and who provide support when gathering and analyzing data. They bring ideas and recommendations to support improvement efforts.

Multiple groups mentioned that Grant Wood AEA staff support school improvement advisory committee work in schools and districts, as well using the SAMI process to address school improvement planning.

The AEA cabinet administrators and equity coordinators shared their structure for gathering feedback from school districts. This structure includes a four-year cycle of data gathering known as “Listening Cycles.” Each year, the AEA engages a representative sampling of school districts, which could include one of the following: a one-on-one meeting between a superintendent and the AEA’s chief administrator; a Grant Wood AEA cabinet to school district cabinet meeting; a meeting between the AEA’s board and a school district board; or a teacher and principal survey. All of these options are focused on gathering data to facilitate future planning. Interviews with school district leaders and staff members verified this process, and interviewees submitted documents providing evidence of AEA analysis and action planning based on the information it gathered.

Grant Wood AEA used the AAMI as a tool to assess the AEA’s implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) as well as their support of school district implementation. AEA staff engaged in analysis of implementation of conceptual areas identified in the SAMI and submitted documents verifying areas of strength and areas of concern. An agency-wide leadership team has established goals for each conceptual area, monitors progress toward each goal area and meets regularly with various role groups to direct the agency’s efforts to enhance their own implementation and to better support district implementation of the MTSS model.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

**B. School-Community Planning:**

Strengths:

Grant Wood AEA staff assists with collecting and analyzing data to inform goal setting. These AEA staff also conduct classroom observations to determine the fidelity of implementation, then provide follow-up support.

The Grant Wood AEA Board, school district special education directors and teachers, AEA consultants and others reported that consultants were a part of their school district team, and often considered as part of the regular staff. For example, the regional administrators are a part of their assigned school districts’ leadership teams. Multiple groups also mentioned the “District Service Plan” developed by Grant Wood AEA. This is a plan used to document all services needed by school districts based on data related to goals and priorities.

The document review included an example of a school district profile of AEA service and support. In addition, AEA leadership, and school district and AEA staff groups, described how Grant Wood AEA staff are assigned to school districts based on an equity formula.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## Professional Development

This section provides evidence that explains how professional development programs offered by the AEA respond to current needs. Iowa Code 273.11(2)(b), 281 IAC 72.4(2)

### Strengths:

Special education directors reported that Grant Wood AEA provides significant professional development support, for example, virtual offerings for paraeducators providing brief, on-demand training in a multitude of topics for individuals working most closely with high-need students. Superintendents, special education directors and teachers all reported excellent AEA support for the ACHIEVE system roll out.

Documents provided in the document review process show evidence of data collection, planning and actions implemented to provide numerous professional learning opportunities for the AEA/district staff such as: leadership standards and practices, counselor programming, special education policy and practice and paraeducator training. High demand topics such as social emotional learning practices embedded in content area curriculum are provided as well. In addition, the AEA provides flexibility with hybrid learning opportunities and mini learning modules that are called micro-credentials.

District superintendents and district special education directors appreciated the flexibility in professional development offerings - virtual learning modules and face to face options for paraeducators, substitutes and classroom teachers. Currently, there are more face to face job embedded learning opportunities in the districts to include demonstration and coaching and data collection and analysis and added support for improving MTSS structures for preschools.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

This section provides evidence of how the AEA supports curriculum development, instruction and assessment for reading, language arts, mathematics and science, using research-based methodologies. Iowa Code 273.11(2)(c), 281 IAC 72.4(3)

### Strengths:

School district administrators and staff described Grant Wood AEA staff as experts in their fields, such as curriculum, evidence-based strategies and assessment. Interviewees said these AEA staffers served as valuable resources to them in their building and district roles. The groups specifically mentioned AEA staff with expertise in social-emotional-behavioral health (SEBH) topics, low-incidence disabilities and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

AEA administration, as well as school district special education directors and principals, mentioned the AEA's work in literacy, and the AEA's flexibility and responsiveness to school districts' needs. For example, the AEA added more special education content consultants along with general education content specialists to collaboratively support school districts' review and adoption of literacy and math.

The Grant Wood AEA cabinet and staff described efforts around mathematics that include contextualized math, where a math teacher collaborates with an industrial arts teacher to cover math standards in a career and technical education course. They also mentioned the Van Allen Science Teaching Center (VAST) and Full Options Science System (FOSS) science kits as resources for not only Grant Wood school districts, but also for other school districts across the state. Multiple school district groups reported the AEA offers resources and support in the areas of English learners (EL), computer science, early childhood and SEBH curriculum connections.

AEA directors and the Grant Wood AEA Board identified equity and access as priorities. They described how the AEA demonstrated this commitment through both AEA goals and intentional, embedded language and actions present throughout presentations, discussions and activities offered in the community. Examples of this work reported by district special education and preschool teachers included training around Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and PBIS. In addition, curriculum directors reported Grant Wood AEA's Culture and Equity Committee helps them process the Conditions for Learning (CfL) survey data, and to develop next steps.

#### Recommendations:

Superintendents and school district special education directors would like additional support in curricular programming for students with significant needs. The site visit team recommends that Grant Wood AEA follow up on these suggestions.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **Diverse learners**

This section provides evidence of support for special education services, gifted and talented children programming, English learner (EL) programming and 504 supports and procedures. Iowa Code 273.2(4)

### **A. Students with disabilities:**

#### Strengths:

School district special education directors and principals described the Grant Wood AEA staff as integral members of their team. Parents also described an overall satisfaction with the relationships created by AEA staff and the AEA's team approach.

Interviews with school district special educators, directors and parents described a collaborative and supportive approach to the delivery of services for students with disabilities. They specifically mentioned the collaboration between general education literacy consultants and special education literacy consultants to support diverse learners. Special education directors reported that a continuum of services in the area of SEBH is offered within an MTSS framework. Documents submitted show evidence of a Special Education Directors' Network, multiple learning opportunities for school district special education staff and the addition of AEA staff to support programming.

#### Recommendations:

Although Grant Wood AEA has dedicated staff to address the needs of students with disabilities, interviewees noted a desire to have additional support from regional administrators with a deeper knowledge of special education policy, regulations and procedures. The site visit team encourages the AEA to continue to survey districts to determine needs and expand the support for students with disabilities.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **B. English Learners:**

### Strengths:

Consultants reported that Grant Wood AEA prioritizes equity in access to early intervention services for the children and families they serve. In particular, the AEA uses interpreters to ensure accurate and efficient communication with families regarding topics involving health and safety, such as feeding and the use of assistive technology or equipment.

The document review provided evidence of numerous learning opportunities available for content area teachers and support staff working with EL students.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **C. Gifted and Talented:**

### Strengths:

School district special education directors reported gifted and talented services have improved over the years. Grant Wood AEA offers services such as College for Kids, programming specifically for gifted and talented students. The AEA also facilitates meetings to support the learning needs of teachers of the gifted and talented student.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations at this time.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **D. Section 504:**

### Strengths:

It was noted through the document review that Grant Wood AEA offers an annual training for educators associated with 504 plans and procedures.

### Recommendations:

The site visit team suggests that the agency survey districts regularly to determine what, if any, needs they may have regarding Section 504 programming.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **Media Technology, Leadership, Multicultural/Gender Fair**

This section provides evidence of: support for instructional media services that supplement and support local district media centers and services; support for school technology planning and staff development for implementing instructional technologies; and assistance provided to school districts for the general improvement of their educational programs and operations. Iowa Code 273.11(2)(f)(g), Iowa Code 273.4(2)

## **A. Media:**

### Strengths:

Superintendents, school district special education directors, and principals noted the strong media, technology and graphic design support provided by Grant Wood AEA. They reported that during the pandemic, media support for virtual learning was especially appreciated. In addition, support for cyber security has been essential. The Media Department also suggests new ideas for consideration.

Multiple groups shared an appreciation for the variety of print and digital materials available in the Grant Wood AEA Media Center. The teacher interview group shared that specific resources, such as the Rotating Reads boxes, were valuable. They also noted their appreciation for the digital resources available. Additionally, one teacher spoke about an open house experience in the media center. She described it as being an eye-opening, hands-on experience where she had the opportunity to use some of the materials available to teachers. Another group referenced access to materials for check-out as an opportunity to try different accessibility tools, furniture or other resources to identify if they match students' needs prior to making a local purchase.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **B. Technology:**

### Strengths:

Grant Wood AEA, school district administrators and staff all commented on the knowledge and expertise of AEA media and information technology (IT) staff in providing both high-quality resources of different types, and readily-available support for technology needs. They commented that the AEA has made it a priority to ensure technology is used appropriately and meaningfully for all learners.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **C. Leadership:**

### Strengths:

Superintendents, special education directors, principals, curriculum directors, and Grant Wood AEA leaders, school improvement staff, and board members shared examples of high-quality learning opportunities related to the leadership standards. For example, the Contemporary School Leadership program that is based on a common core of learning designed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century context of education. The Grant Wood AEA board reported the AEA offers an internal leadership learning opportunity called "Organizational Leadership" as well as network offerings for superintendents, principals, curriculum and special education directors.

Both the Grant Wood AEA cabinet and school district special education directors described the relationship between the AEA's regional administrators and school district leadership teams. Regional administrators are often a part of school districts' leadership teams to provide support and guidance in the areas of special education, school improvement and accessing AEA resources. They are seen as the "face" of Grant Wood AEA. Special education directors felt strongly about the need for consistency in the regional administrators assigned to their districts, but also recognized the need at times for a fresh perspective. They shared that they need regional administrators who challenge their thinking, and ensure their knowledge matches the districts' needs.

Multiple groups provided examples of Grant Wood AEA's support during the SAMI process utilized at both the school and school district levels. The groups described deep levels of collaboration that led to the development of action plans, and monitoring implementation of those plans. Additionally, AEA content consultants spoke to the use of various differentiated accountability tools to support this continuous improvement process. The regional administrator model was cited by multiple interview groups as a strength that provided visibility, developed relationships and was a support during administrative and school district meetings.

Interview groups reported, and document review indicated the AEA offers numerous leadership development opportunities. For example, the Contemporary School Leadership program is based on a common core of learning designed for the 21st century context of education. In addition, the Grant Wood AEA Board reported the AEA offers an internal leadership learning opportunity called "Organizational Leadership," which builds internal leadership capacity.

#### Recommendations:

District special education directors felt strongly about the need for continuity in the regional administrators assigned to their districts, but also recognized the need at times for a fresh perspective. The directors also expressed a need of regional administrators who challenge their thinking, know the law and best practice and whose knowledge matches the district's needs.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

### **D. Multicultural/Gender Fair:**

#### Strengths:

Documents provided by Grant Wood AEA demonstrate the AEA's equity work, such as an updated Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Plan (EEO/AA) which contains all of the components required by Iowa Code.

#### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **Management Services**

This section provides evidence of any services to school districts, not limited to: superintendent services, personnel services, business management services, special maintenance services and transportation services. Iowa Code 273.7A

### Strengths:

Superintendents, special education directors, principals, curriculum directors, special education staff and Grant Wood AEA school improvement staff provided examples of relevant and responsive management services offered to school districts. Examples included management of student information systems, IT, business office, substitute personnel management (SubCentral) and crisis response services.

### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations at this time

### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the desk audit and site visit the team determine the following standards have been met:

- School-Community Planning: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(a), 281 IAC 72.4(1)
- Professional Development: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(b), 281 IAC 72.4(2)
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(c), 281 IAC 72.4(3)
- Diverse Learners: Iowa Code 273.2(4)
- Media, Technology, Leadership, Multicultural/Gender Fair: Iowa Code 273.11(2)(f)(g), Iowa Code 273.4(2)
- Management Services: Iowa Code 273.7A

### Recommendation:

It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation to AEA through the next review period.