

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



Agenda Item: Great Prairie 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 Great Prairie 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.

Great Prairie Area Education Agency 2022 Accreditation Report



October 12, 2022

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

State Board of Education

Brooke Axiotis, Des Moines
Rod Bradley, Denison
Cindy Dietz, Cedar Rapids
Cassandra Halls, Carlisle
Brian J. Kane, Dubuque
Nathan Peterson, Iowa City
Mike May, Spirit Lake
John Robbins, Iowa Falls
Georgia Van Gundy, Waukee
Alaina Whittington, student member, Diagonal

Administration

Ann Lebo, Director and Executive Officer
of the State Board of Education

Division of Learning and Results

Kim Buryanek, Division Administrator

Bureau of School Improvement

Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant
Sara Nickel, Consultant

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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.

Great Prairie AEA Service Area Data:

- 32 public school districts
- 9 nonpublic schools
- 36,490 students, preschool through grade 12
- 3 comprehensive schools
- 45 targeted schools
- 242 total staff
- Covers 6,268 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:

According to interview groups and document review, Great Prairie AEA is working to improve through analyzing data collected from internal and external sources such as: the AEA Assessment of Infrastructure for Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Implementation (AAMI), school district customer satisfaction surveys and student progress data. Data is used to target and align AEA resources as well as create the AEA's continuous improvement plan, or its "Theory of Action." Goals within the "Theory of Action" include increasing the number of elementary schools in which students meet proficiency on student progress assessments, and increasing the percentage of students exited from special education services.

The "Theory of Action" also calls for regional directors, who oversee staff and services within the AEA's six regions, to target a specific area of need and align resources accordingly. Regional directors subsequently created individual regional plans and a means for monitoring progress

towards specific actions. Statements made by AEA staff and leaders indicate value in monitoring their plans and expanding successful initiatives to other schools.

Recommendations:

Interview groups stated they are aware of Great Prairie AEA's goals and are working to target services to align with the AEA's goals. Interview groups also discussed using the continuous improvement process as a means to analyze effective evidence-based practices, and to eliminate practices that are no longer effective. The site visit team recommends the AEA continue to assess data, target specific areas of need, align services and monitor results to systematically improve services for southeast Iowa students.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. School-Community Planning:

Strengths:

Document review and school and community interview groups indicated support for school and community planning. Great Prairie AEA administers a customer satisfaction survey every year. Results are shared with various stakeholders and used as a data source for the AEA's comprehensive improvement plan.

During site visit interviews, group members vocalized satisfaction with the AEA's partnerships and collaboration with area mental health agencies, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Indian Hills Community College and Southeastern Community College. Great Prairie AEA leadership and staff stated these partnerships are used to maximize AEA services for students, and to support action goals. School district leaders specifically indicated these partnerships were imperative to supporting school and community needs during and post-pandemic.

Recommendations:

Parent, district and AEA board member groups expressed appreciation for the collaboration between Great Prairie AEA, schools and the community. The site visit team recommends the AEA continue to collaborate with schools and community partners as a means to carry out district and AEA goals, and to support southeast Iowa's students and families.

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:

Great Prairie AEA provides a wide range of professional learning opportunities as evidenced in document review and interview groups. Professional learning opportunities are available to early childhood educators, teachers, administrators and paraeducators. AEA staff and administration expressed appreciation for the newly-established paraeducator certification program. Document review and interview groups indicated Great Prairie AEA initiated the program due to the need for more paraeducators in schools. The program provides targeted learning for paraprofessionals in a variety of professional pathways such as early childhood, substitute authorization and English learner (EL) support.

Both interview groups and document review indicate Great Prairie AEA offers professional development opportunities through a variety of modalities, including: virtual; in-person at the AEA's three office locations; in-district on professional learning days; and small group learning for educators through professional learning communities.

School and AEA consultant interview groups stated that Great Prairie AEA determines professional development needs through school data reviews and professional learning planning. Curriculum director, teacher and school administrator groups stated that AEA consultants are skilled in targeting needs, meeting schools where they are in their learning, and utilizing structures already in place within schools to collaborate and provide continued coaching support.

Recommendations:

Document review and interview groups indicated Great Prairie AEA is trying a new approach to systematically and equitably provide professional development and consultation by appointing one point of contact to each of its six regions. As described in interviews, school leaders and educators may contact the regional director for their area and request consultation and services. These requests are monitored and provide data the AEA intends to utilize for planning and continuous improvement. Satisfaction with the process varied among interview groups. The site visit team recommends Great Prairie AEA continue to monitor feedback regarding the new process. Great Prairie AEA should also continuously communicate to school district administrators and school staff about these changes, and how the AEA will continue to fine-tune the process to provide continuity of services among the different regions.

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:

Document review and interview groups described how Great Prairie AEA supports school districts and schools as they deploy curriculum development, evidence-based instructional practices and assessment systems. Regional directors and school improvement consultants collaborate with building leadership teams to analyze student data, set goals, determine instructional and curricular needs and create school improvement plans. Great Prairie AEA also provided evidence, and interview groups discussed how content consultants provide professional development to educators about evidence-based instruction. Another learning opportunity offered by the AEA is how to analyze adopted curricular materials to support local student learning needs at the universal, targeted and intensive levels.

Great Prairie AEA also provided evidence of various network groups for leaders, content area educators, instructional coaches and curriculum directors. During on-site interviews, educators stressed the importance of these networking opportunities to both learn from each other, and to learn about up-and-coming practices and resources.

Recommendations:

Document review and AEA staff interview groups expressed excitement about pilot projects in the areas of literacy and mathematics, where content area consultants provide learning opportunities for special education staff members to build expertise. The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA continue to provide opportunities for internal staff to build knowledge about evidence-based instructional strategies in different content areas. The site visit team also recommends the AEA continue to provide multiple modes of service delivery through virtual, in-person and in-district learning opportunities.

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, EL programming and 504 supports and procedures. Iowa Code 273.2(4)

A. Students with Disabilities:

Strengths:

Great Prairie AEA provided evidence of the AEA's organizational structure, and how the AEA is working to integrate instructional and special education services to best serve school districts, schools and students. District and teacher interview groups indicated service providers and special education teachers felt supported during the ACHIEVE system rollout. Special education teachers also expressed appreciation for support with assistive technology for students. They were also pleased with transition services for students and families to support special education students when they change grade level buildings, transition from Part C to B services and move into postsecondary life.

Parents who utilize Early ACCESS services stated they appreciate Great Prairie AEA's individualized, family-guided routines coaching and how the AEA supports families by transporting them to the AEA office when service providers cannot meet with the families at their homes.

Evidence and interviews indicated the AEA's variety and continuum of support for students with autism and children with challenging behavior needs. School district administrators stated appreciation for the assistance Great Prairie AEA leaders provided with helping to write therapeutic classroom grants, support during COVID-19 response and ensuring mental health and students' IEPs were carried out during virtual learning.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA continue to monitor and adjust services and support for diverse learning needs as necessary.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. English Learners:

Strengths:

Document review and interview groups indicated that districts feel supported in addressing EL needs. Various interview groups expressed appreciation for the AEA's EL teacher network, where teachers with similar jobs have the opportunity to collaborate and learn about evidence-

based practices in EL, can participate in English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) data review and undertake program planning.

Interviews with Great Prairie AEA cabinet members, content consultants and special education staff revealed they were excited to share a pilot project integrating assistive technology through the use of translation earbuds. The special education consultant and mathematics consultant were pleased to share that for the first time ever, they were able to accurately assess a student who has EL needs and is going through the disability suspect process.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA continue to offer networking opportunities to EL teachers, and work to scale-up pilot projects that are successful with service integration. Concerns were expressed during interviews that there is only one trained EL consultant. The site visit team also suggests the AEA work to internally train other consultants to build expertise in EL needs and services, so institutional knowledge is not lost when there is staff turnover.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Gifted and Talented:

Strengths:

Document review and interview groups indicate support for teachers in addressing students with gifted and talented learning needs. During interviews with AEA cabinet members, it was noted that they realized there was a need to address this area. In response, Great Prairie AEA partnered with Grant Wood AEA for additional support and learning opportunities.

Recommendations:

Interview groups with district administrators and school staff indicated a lack of awareness about the AEA's partnership with Grant Wood AEA. The site visit team recommends Great Prairie AEA continue to communicate and advertise this newly-founded partnership to educators. The site visit team also suggests the AEA work internally to train content consultants to build expertise in gifted and talented education, so institutional knowledge is not lost when there is staff turnover.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Section 504:

Strengths:

Great Prairie AEA offers 504 supports as evidenced in document review and interviews with AEA cabinet members. Resources and support for districts are offered on an as-needed basis.

Recommendations:

Based on interviews with Great Prairie AEA cabinet members, consultants and school district staff, the AEA recognizes the need for more professional learning opportunities to increase capacity and knowledge in this area. The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA work with the Department in this area for additional support.

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:

Document review indicates that Great Prairie AEA publicizes their media services through a variety of print and digital formats. School educator interview groups expressed satisfaction with Great Prairie AEA's range of resources. Data provided through the document review shows that resources are frequently utilized throughout the school year.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA continue communicating to districts and schools about the services and equipment available and accessible to teachers and students.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. Technology:

Strengths:

Interview groups with school district, school and technology leaders indicated satisfaction with the services and support provided by Great Prairie AEA. School district and school staff stated they appreciated the AEA's guidance and support with implementing and planning for the new computer science standards rollout.

Document review and interviews with AEA staff indicated that Great Prairie AEA has knowledge of up-and-coming technology needs such as cybersecurity. Future professional development and planning meetings are scheduled to provide cybersecurity education, as well as support in developing plans for how to respond if schools experience a cyberattack.

Recommendations:

Interviewees indicated satisfaction with technology services for educators and students. The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA remain informed about new technology, and how to continue supporting districts, schools, educators and students.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Leadership:

Strengths:

Documents and interviews provided evidence that Great Prairie AEA offers many opportunities for leadership through various network groups and professional development. The AEA has also responded to internal late resignations through organizational restructuring, as evidenced by

documents and interviews with AEA leadership. According to interviews with Great Prairie AEA cabinet members and staff, the restructuring has distributed responsibilities, created more leadership opportunities and further integrated services between instructional and special education consultants.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends the AEA continue to provide a variety of networking opportunities and leadership development through professional learning offerings.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Multicultural/Gender Fair:

Strengths:

Great Prairie AEA partners with Indian Hills Community College and other local agencies to host an annual diversity conference, as evidenced in document reviews. Documents and interviews also indicate AEA course offerings for culturally-responsive teaching, as well as embedded learning provided by content consultants.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Great Prairie AEA continue to offer learning opportunities for AEA staff and local educators that address equitable education opportunities for all students.

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:

Interviewees among school district, school and teaching staff stated that Great Prairie AEA provides consistency and continuity during periods of transition with school district leadership staff. Documents and interviews indicated the AEA provides services to school districts when there are late resignations, or shortages in positions which are difficult to fill such as business services, shared superintendents and social work services. School administrators expressed great appreciation for the AEA's COVID-19 response efforts, and continued support post-pandemic.

Recommendations:

District administrators, teachers and parent interview groups stated they feel there is an honest partnership with Great Prairie AEA. The site visit team recommends the AEA continue these efforts.

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.