

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



Agenda Item: Green Hills 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 Green Hills AEA through the next review period.

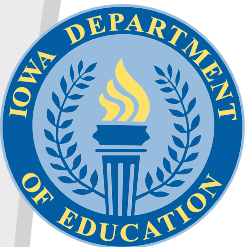
Background:

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.

Green Hills Area Education Agency 2022 Accreditation Report



October 12, 2022

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Department of Education
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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.

Green Hills AEA Service Area Data:

- 43 public school districts
- 6 nonpublic schools
- 40,537 students, preschool through grade 12
- 3 comprehensive schools (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) designation)
- 39 targeted schools (ESSA designation)
- 297 total staff members
- Covers 8,406 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:

Multiple interview groups identified, and documents supported, that Green Hills AEA is working to implement a comprehensive improvement plan. For example, the AEA has engaged in continuous improvement by utilizing and implementing the following continuous improvement processes and procedures:

- Supplemental Support Analysis which includes Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) training for districts
- AEA Assessment of the Infrastructure for MTSS Implementation (AAMI)
- Green Hills AEA has 40 content and service continuous improvement teams, each team has specific meeting dates with defined agendas
- Multiple data sources utilized by the School Improvement team to support the 42 targeted and three comprehensive schools designated under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

- ESSA network team which works in collaboration with the Department to serve ESSA designated schools

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. School-Community Planning:

Strengths:

Multiple interview groups and desk audit documents supported the AEA's work to facilitate and support strong school-community partnerships. Numerous examples of this work include:

- Preschool family night
- Superintendent Association monthly meetings
- Students, Teachers, Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence grant support
- Crisis response team
- Portrait of a graduate - a collaborative effort with school districts to provide deeper learning for every student
- Regional career and technical education planning
- Unified team – a interagency team consisting of school improvement, content specific and special services staff which collaborates to meet the needs of both ESSA and special education designated schools

Groups interviewed made very strong positive comments about the work of Early Access, special education representatives, speech language pathologists, occupational therapist, physical therapist, the Challenging Behavior Team, and the Autism Team. The comments also reflected positively on how these staff members helped both the families and the districts they serve.

Interviewees discussed the importance of allocating the right resources to the right districts. Although decisions are based on data, it was mentioned that they use a data-informed approach rather than a completely data-driven approach. Interviewees also stated the school improvement consultants offer training and support with writing their plans, such as the strategic and service delivery plans.

Multiple interview groups were impressed with the preschool home visit process. Parents recommended adding videos to the Green Hills AEA website discussing the services provided to students through the AEA before students reach school age.

Recommendations:

Multiple interview groups reported the difficulty faced by Green Hills AEA to provide equitable services across the AEA's large service area, which is the second largest in the state. The AEA cabinet discussed the challenges it faces finding consultants to serve the eastern part of the AEA, since distance is a barrier. In addition, school district staff reported the need for professional development offered closer to schools in the east. School district staff interviewees noted a lack of knowledge regarding all the services offered by Green Hills AEA. The site visit team is aware that Green Hills AEA is implementing plans to ensure a more equitable service delivery model, with more face-to-face interactions. The team recommends the AEA put procedures in place to ensure this effort continues.

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:

The Green Hills AEA cabinet and other interviewees reported that Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training is offered throughout the AEA. Ten consultants are certified to provide professional development for LETRS. This training in the science of reading is reported by interviewees to be high-quality professional learning. Numerous interview groups spoke about the benefits of this program. The Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) literacy team for special education students collaborates with general education literacy consultants to ensure the literacy needs of all students are met. The AEA has focused on programs including social-emotional behavioral health learning services and supports like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices, Challenge to Change (Yoga and Mindfulness) and Rachel's Challenge.

The school improvement team is working with districts using Teacher Clarity, an evidence-based model which focuses on assisting students to evaluate their own learning through the use of success criteria and feedback. In addition, PREPaRE training curriculum focuses on school crisis prevention and response, providing evidence-based resources. Data Dashboard, an AEA-wide system for data comparison, is also used for all schools. The information is then shared with Field Directors so they can assist the schools with digging into their data. Additional training opportunities include:

- Science writing heuristic
- Google Classroom
- Special education literacy
- Special education mathematics
- Cognitive coaching

Multiple interview groups praised Green Hills AEA's support for conferences and regional training. For example, they annually sponsor a pre-service, "Grow with Green Hills Conference." AEA staff, school district educators, administrators and parents learn about mental health topics such as restorative justice and eight dimensions of wellbeing. This event kicks off social-emotional learning for the AEA and the school districts they serve. The AEA also supports the Western Iowa Conference Schools with speakers and technology support, at their annual convention. Additionally, Green Hills AEA staff provide numerous regional training opportunities such as data days. AEA staff has engaged in proactive planning for regional ESSA training by exploring opportunities for on-site and virtual coaching and/or off-hours options. Regional trainings have included:

- Data-based decision-making
- Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAMI) for buildings and districts
- Social-Emotional Behavioral Health (SEBH)

The Green Hills AEA Cabinet, special education director and school improvement consultants discussed the benefits of micro-credential offerings. Participants can essentially create their own "playlist" to expand their knowledge in areas of interest. Interview groups reported content

specialists follow-up with coaching opportunities for those who participate in professional learning. They also stated that speech language pathologists serve in a more consultative role to maximize the number of students they reach. Green Hills AEA requires its staff to focus on data system usage and fidelity to the data.

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:

Interview groups noted the importance of Green Hills AEA's support for social-emotional learning curriculum work, and that the AEA has been a leader in this area. For example, many interviewees mentioned the role Rachel's Challenge and Restorative Practices have played in the area of student mental health. Rachel's Challenge is a program aimed at preventing student violence, and includes anti-bullying and mental health crisis response training. Restorative practices studies how to build relationships between individuals, and create social connections within communities.

Many interview groups mentioned the support they received with their MTSS process. Not only did AEA personnel help by serving on schools' data teams, several schools reported that AEA staff examined data on their own, and pointed out issues the school team had failed to see, such as chronic attendance issues. There are a wide variety of assessments used to determine the effectiveness and efficacy of curriculum. Green Hills AEA also assists school districts with better understanding the use of the Panorama Student Success system to access vital screening data. This means the AEA is supporting teachers through training in large groups, small groups or individually with the following data systems:

- FastBridge screening
- Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Assessment (SAEBRS)
- Individual Growth and Development (IGDIs) for infants and toddlers
- Assessment, Evaluation and Programming System (AEPS)
- Shared Writing Instruction Model for students with intellectual disabilities (SWIM)
- Database overview for special education representatives

General education teachers reported that Green Hills AEA literacy consultants assist school districts with curriculum, instruction and assessment services. The consultants often provide professional development and do follow-up visits to ensure fidelity of implementation of resource that support the curriculum. A number of school district personnel mentioned the great support they have gotten with curriculum adoptions, specifically in the area of mathematics. Illustrative Math was mentioned by several districts as a curriculum for which the AEA has provided support. When school districts made this change to curriculum, the AEA mathematics consultant was present at every professional development day while teachers learned to incorporate the new models. Superintendents stated that without AEA facilitation, the mathematics curriculum review would be at a standstill.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

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:

Parents, special education teachers and specialized services representatives all commented on how parents are actively involved in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) processes at all levels. Much of that involvement was directly related to the relationships the speech language pathologists and special education representatives had with staff and parents. Multiple groups felt building special education representatives (SER) and the support they provide are second to none. SERs have been accepted and integrated into schools as members of the team. This speaks highly of the relationships they have established and built with teachers and administrators. Teachers also reported that Green Hills AEA assists teachers who have hearing-impaired students. Other services interviewees recognized include:

- Assistive technology and adaptive equipment
- Early Access
- ACHIEVE (statewide IEP system) training
- Therapeutic classrooms

Recommendations:

School district special education directors expressed a need for more support as leaders and in creating leadership opportunities for students with IEPs. They stated districts and schools would benefit from increased support from social workers and with preschool special education services. Green Hills AEA parents requested support in earlier knowledge of service availability for their learners and continuation of services between transitions from Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) part C (birth through 36 months of age) to part B (3 through 21 years of age).

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. English Learners:

Strengths:

Interview groups stated that Green Hills AEA provides strong EL support with a dedicated EL consultant who collaborates across teams to serve school districts with existing and emerging EL populations.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Gifted and Talented:

Strengths:

Interview groups recognized the efforts Green Hills AEA is making in the area of gifted and talented education. The AEA board described the process of hearing proposals for increased programming in gifted and talented education based on need, and providing additional support. Principals reported that the AEA hired an additional consultant and district staff have taken advantage of new training provided to district staff such as Jump Start to TAG.

Recommendations:

Although Green Hills AEA has begun to address gifted and talented services, interviewees noted the professional development offerings are limited. Although gifted and talented supports have been increased over prior years, the site visit team encourages the AEA to continue to survey school districts and expand support for gifted students.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Section 504:

Strengths:

Interviewees indicated, and document uploads confirmed, that Green Hills AEA has developed a comprehensive Section 504 manual for school districts and teams to utilize for district level 504 program evaluation.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

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:

The desk audit revealed, and interviews confirmed, that Green Hills AEA media vans distribute education materials, written communications, lamination, printing and equipment to districts throughout the AEA twice a week. The AEA also provided a five-year record for materials circulation to the site visit team. This record assists the AEA in managing its media assets. Other media services include:

- Teacher-Librarian Personal Learning Communities (PLC)
- Technology Director PLC

- Media collection analysis for multicultural/gender fair content

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. Technology:

Strengths:

Multiple interview groups described the technology support from Green Hills AEA as a vital component of the services it provides. The AEA's technology services have expanded and been invaluable to small school districts that may not have dedicated staff for technology. For example, interviewees noted AEA technology staff come on-site and spend the day providing service. Superintendents reported Green Hills AEA provides invaluable assistance with the Strategic Computer Science for All Resource and Implementation Planning Tool (SCRIPT) plan as part of the computer science initiative, helping with grants, cybersecurity and training teachers in the statewide digital resource AEA OneClick. In addition, the AEA's technology audit has been a huge help. The AEA's early childhood staff reported appreciation for the jet packs and cellular-enabled iPads available for checkout to families wanting or needing virtual/digital communication. Other AEA technology initiatives include:

- E-rate application assistance
- Data warehousing
- Addition of Director of Instructional Technology position in the AEA cabinet

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Leadership:

Strengths:

The Green Hills AEA cabinet and the board discussed the field director role and their direct support of principals, noting that their addition has been a positive change. For example, field directors are part of the AEA's cabinet. They support principals and staff at their assigned schools, as well as AEA staff serving those buildings. Principals reported field directors have offered great support, and have provided a safe venue to discuss difficult situations. These AEA staff members are always available via phone and email, and are fantastic liaisons, providing resources as needed. Interviewees said the program is great because field directors have been principals and have experienced many of the same issues.

Green Hills AEA special education leadership, principals, superintendents and other staff reported the AEA offers multiple leadership opportunities and leadership support for emergency issues and crises. The AEA chief administrator has also filled in for superintendents in the past, and is serving as a mentor for new superintendents. The superintendents stated they appreciate the opportunity for collaboration during their monthly association meetings, which are opportunities for leadership to compare notes and share resources. Additional leadership opportunities supported by the AEA include:

- Principal Impact Class (26 principals this year)
- Instructional coaches
- Special Education Advisory Council
- Urban Education Network (UEN)
- AEA-wide coaching model
- Grow your Own school psychologist program
- Logic model (for AEA service analysis)

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Multicultural/Gender Fair:

Strengths:

Several groups, including equity coordinators, reported that Green Hills AEA has made considerable efforts to bring equity to the forefront. The AEA offers the following trainings, programs and policies:

- Video presentation to explain House File (HF) 802, explaining to school district staff how this law would impact their work. HF 802 is an Act establishing specific requirements related to racism and sexism training conducted at, and diversity and inclusion efforts by, state governmental entities
- Restorative practices training for AEA and school district staff
- Implicit bias training sessions for the AEA board, AEA staff and school districts of how implicit biases may affect work with students and parents
- Rachel's Challenge
- Equity task force and the development of the AEA Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy

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:

Multiple interview groups addressed chronic student absenteeism in their communities. They noted School-based interventionists are best positioned to help with this problem. School-based interventionists are available through a partnership with juvenile court and Green Hills AEA. School-level interviewees praised the availability of the interventionists as they make a real difference for students experiencing difficult situations. District level-leadership noted the availability of teacher-librarian services. The state is experiencing a decline in the number of licensed teacher-librarians. Green Hills AEA is offering the teacher-librarian service to be a

bridge for the district while searching for a qualified teacher-librarian by enacting sharing arrangements with surrounding districts, or training an existing district employee (including required coursework).

Interviewees reported that Green Hills AEA shares numerous services with other AEAs, such as a print shop and computer repair. In addition, the AEA uses bulk purchasing discounts for high-need items used by school districts, such as video equipment and televisions.

Recommendations:

The AEA provides numerous management services on an as needed basis, it wasn't clear to the site visit team how the AEA gathers data to determine which services have the highest needs and/or which services are consistently utilized by districts. During this time of shifting educational landscape, Green Hills AEA leadership may want to establish processes and procedures to survey districts and schools' requirements in the area of management services.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

Conclusion

Based on the desk audit and site visit the team determined that 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.