

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



Agenda Item: Heartland 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 Heartland 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.

Heartland 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

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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

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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.

Heartland AEA Service Area Data:

- 53 public school districts
- 32 nonpublic schools
- 157,001 students, preschool through grade 12
- 6 comprehensive schools
- 98 targeted schools
- 723 total staff members
- Covers 6,448 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 documents, Heartland AEA's "Agency Playbook" serves as its Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). The "Agency Playbook" established a shared direction to implement AEA programs. Examples of the shared direction in the "Agency Playbook" include: system blueprint, core values, strategic priorities and priority service areas. The core values of Heartland AEA are "caring, proactive and collaborative." Interviews indicate the AEA is truly living these core values.

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 commented on the positive relationship between Heartland AEA and the districts and schools it serves. Each described their team as accessible, responsive, and readily willing to offer information and connections for supports.

Examples included:

- Facilitating the self-assessment of multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) implementation (SAMI) needs assessment
- Leading student assessment data discussions to make instructional decisions
- Providing crisis response assistance
- Providing support for student transitions from one program to another, or from one building to another
- Working with the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) to build relationships with parents and directing them to resources.

Interview groups reported AEA staff actively participate in developing plans for improvement, finding a good balance of being part of the team without taking over the discussion. Various groups talked specifically about MTSS processes, data dashboards and needs assessments as ways the AEA supports school districts in community planning.

Multiple interview groups commented on Heartland AEA's network group meetings. These groups were formed based on needs of districts and schools in the AEA. Networks include:

- Behavior Support Community of Practice
- Counseling
- Curriculum
- English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Equity Director
- Future Ready
- Heartland Administrators' Association
- Instructional Coaching
- Principal Alliance Leadership Series
- Special Education
- Teacher Leadership Coordinator
- Teacher Leader Mentor
- Technology Coordinator

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:

Multiple interview groups commented on how much districts and schools appreciated the AEA's support for professional development, and how responsive Heartland AEA is to meeting the individualized and personalized needs of each school district and school. Examples included:

- Implementing an MTSS framework
- Training on Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)
- Training on the ACHIEVE system
- Providing specific literacy and math curricula and strategies related to instruction

Document review indicated Heartland AEA serves a wide range of schools and school districts, including rural, suburban (the fastest-growing) and urban (including Des Moines Public Schools, the largest school district in the state). Interviews indicated Heartland AEA meets the needs of all of the school districts and schools it serves. The AEA achieved this success by building both internal and external staff capacity to implement evidence-based practices. To that end, Heartland AEA offers consistent professional development in networks as well as AEA- and school district-led learning opportunities. Heartland AEA also provides coaching and support for school district staff developing professional development presentations and materials.

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:

Assessment expertise and related data analysis routines were noted as Heartland AEA strengths by interview groups. Although the AEA's data reviews included different aggregates of data, interviewees welcomed and appreciated the ability to analyze information from different perspectives.

Multiple interview groups were appreciative of the AEA's instructional design and delivery supports for students with unique needs, particularly those with significant disabilities. Additionally, school district staff received training and support in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), as well as the appropriate use of assistive technology.

Interview groups reported appreciation for Heartland AEA support in a variety of areas including: literacy, math, and career and technical education. They commented that AEA support is aligned to school and school district data and standards.

Interviewees indicated that Heartland AEA has a consistent message via **Networks**, site-based teams and content area support personnel to assist school districts. Content examples include:

Science of Reading, Numeracy Project, computer science standards, review of functional assessment screening tool Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST), Iowa statewide assessment of student progress (ISASP) and Panorama data and reading curriculum adoption.

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:

Interview groups appreciated the support Heartland AEA provides for students with disabilities. They often mentioned the Challenging Behaviors and Autism Team (CBAT) and support for ACHIEVE. Many commented the key to success has been good communication between the AEA, school district staff and parents.

School district staff reported a desire to tap the expertise of AEA psychologists and social workers, but their time is consumed by Child Find, support of the new ACHIEVE system and paperwork.

Multiple interviewees commented that Heartland AEA leadership prioritized providing individual technical assistance and supports based on school district and school data. School district administration and staff described an appreciation for these individualized services based on individual, district and building data.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. English Learners:

Strengths:

Multiple interviewees appreciated the EL services provided by Heartland AEA. One of the examples included the ESOL Network established by Heartland AEA to provide EL teachers and staff with a forum to share best practices and struggles.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Gifted and Talented:

Strengths:

Multiple interviewees appreciated the gifted and talented services provided by Heartland AEA. Examples included: "Gifted and Talented" e-newsletter, website resources and Gifted Academy.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Section 504:

Strengths:

Multiple interviewees appreciated the 504 services provided by Heartland AEA. Examples included relevant, up-to-date information on the AEA website, and individualized, building-level 504 evaluation, placement and plan development.

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:

Interviewees appreciated the availability of media resources for school districts to borrow, and in some situations, to pilot, prior to purchase. Additionally, they cited assistive technology loan options, such as a microphone to amplify communication for a child with cochlear implants, standers for physical therapy and communication devices addressing speech/language needs.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. Technology:

Strengths:

Interviewees appreciated the technology resources and services Heartland AEA provides to districts and schools. An example mentioned was the Technology Coordinator Network, which allowed districts and schools to discuss technology needs and resources.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Leadership:

Strengths:

Multiple groups commented on leadership opportunities Heartland AEA provided to school districts and schools. These included extensive programs to meet the needs of specific leadership groups, such as: Superintendent Network; Heartland Administrator's Association; Principal Alliance Leadership Series; Curriculum Directors Network; and Counselors Network.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Multicultural/Gender Fair:

Strengths:

Multiple AEA staff commented that shared learning around equity and diversity allowed them to challenge one another with student data, pushing back on conversations to ensure student achievement was a priority. In addition, document review and interviews indicated Heartland AEA established an Equity Director Network. The network provides a forum for equity coordinators to collaborate on district and school topics.

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:

The AEA management team received outstanding reviews from multiple groups, such as finance, business services, special education, education and media. Examples of Heartland AEA's management services include:

- Expanding the Business Officials professional network
- Sharing print services with Green Hills AEA
- Assistance on specialized transportation for students with special needs

- Providing superintendent services
- Management of at-risk classrooms
- Adding networks to meet job specific needs

Recommendations:

Based on discussions with interviewees, the site visit team recommends that Heartland AEA continue to explore opportunities to expand management services the AEA provides to school districts and schools. These may include services for districts and schools with rapidly expanding or declining enrollments.

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.