

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



**Agenda Item:** Northwest 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 Northwest AEA through the next review period.

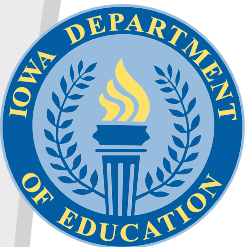
**Background:**

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.

# **Northwest 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.

## Northwest AEA Service Area Data:

- 34 public school districts
- 32 nonpublic schools
- 47,866 students, preschool through grade 12
- 4 comprehensive schools
- 29 targeted schools
- 270.55 total staff members
- Covers 6,226 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:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated structural changes were needed to improve efficiency. This assertion was evident based on the Agency Assessment of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (AAMI) results, feedback from various advisory groups, customer survey results, and implementation research.

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews also indicated that the AEA works with community partners to provide services. The AEA's website includes an exhaustive list of community partners.

#### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

**B. School-Community Planning:**

Strengths:

According to documents, including agendas and minutes from two separate advisory committees, the community is involved in the Northwest AEA's planning. For example, based on Northwest AEA's SAMI results, feedback from various advisory groups, customer survey results and research on implementation, Northwest AEA restructured its service delivery model.

Similarly, the desk audit and interviews indicated partnerships between the agencies and schools, as evidenced by partnership meetings, agendas and logs.

Recommendations:

The site visit team encourages Northwest AEA to continue utilizing the community partnership meetings along with data from the customer service survey to determine the AEA's needs.

The site visit team also encourages Northwest AEA to use its community partnership meetings to communicate the many programs and services the AEA has used to meet student needs.

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 Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated the professional development programs offered by the AEA respond to current needs. This was evidenced by input from the professional development advisory team and responses from partnership meetings.

The desk audit and interviews also demonstrated Northwest AEA offers various courses through its website to enhance educator skills and practices to improve student learning. For example, course offerings include "Best Practices in the Classroom," "Career and Technical Education Program Summit," and "Trauma Responsive Practice."

Recommendations:

Interviews and the desk audit indicated that Northwest AEA does not offer professional development opportunities on bullying or harassment. The site visit team encourages the AEA to utilize information available on the [Department's Bullying and Harassment webpage](#).

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:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated personnel are trained to provide systematic support for school district personnel in crafting their district or building improvement plans. This is evidenced through its “Teacher Leader Network” newsletter, which provides important information and resources.

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews also demonstrated how systems coaches work within districts to support curricular material adoptions and implementing with fidelity. Evidence includes a coaching assignment spreadsheet and a video of a school district describing how they access and utilize Northwest AEA services.

### 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 programming, and programming for English Learners (EL) programming, and 504 supports and procedures. Iowa Code 273.2(4)

### **A. Students with Disabilities:**

#### Strengths:

According to the Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews, the AEA maintains a special education support framework for school districts. A special education webpage details services provided by Northwest AEA.

#### Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

### **B. English Learners:**

#### Strengths:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews showed evidence of EL support through a cross-representative EL team. The team plans support for schools, along with an AEA EL lead consultant who offers assistance to school districts.

#### Recommendations:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated that the AEA is not consistently communicating to school districts and schools the available EL support. The site visit team encourages the AEA to use various communication tools to develop a strong EL network.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

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

#### Strengths:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated evidence of a Gifted and Talented process to support districts as the need arises. This is evidenced through two Gifted and Talented endorsed coaches who have the capability to support districts when gifted and talented support is needed.

#### Recommendations:

Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews did not indicate evidence of a consistent communication of gifted and talented support available to districts and schools. The AEA is encouraged to use various communication tools to develop a gifted and talented network.

#### Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

### **D. Section 504:**

#### Strengths:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated evidence of a Section 504 process to support school districts as the need arises. For example, the AEA has system coaches to support school districts working with Section 504 situations. Additionally, the AEA employs a lead Section 504 consultant to assist school districts and provide internal professional development for the system coaches.

#### Recommendations:

Interviewees, along with the Northwest AEA desk audit, indicated the AEA does not provide consistent communication regarding Section 504 support available to school districts and schools. The site visit team encourages the AEA to review how this resource is communicated to districts and schools to ensure they are aware of the 504 resources the AEA has to offer.

#### 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 Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews provided evidence of media support, such as employing a full-time teacher-librarian along with other media staff, and coordinating the physical inventory of resources available for checkout to teachers and other school staff members.

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews also indicated evidence of media support through the Northwest AEA Creative Services department. The department has two graphic designers



and two print and production technicians. It produces many different products to enhance learning in the classroom, along with communication tools for school districts.

Recommendations:

Both interviewees and supporting documentation recommended that Northwest AEA highlight the types of materials and equipment available to school districts and schools. The site visit team encourages Northwest AEA to follow-up on these suggestions.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

**B. Technology:**

Strengths:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews showed evidence of technical support for district technology directors, while the AEA's instructional technology best practice coaches provide teachers support for using technology in the classroom.

The desk audit and interviews also indicated that Northwest AEA maintains a large quantity of adaptive technology available for checkout. The AEA publishes library resources online that are available to school and school district staff.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

**C. Leadership:**

Strengths:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated evidence of solid leadership throughout the AEA, as evidenced by regular leadership meetings between the AEA and superintendents and principals, and through the Teacher Leadership 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:

The Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated the presence of some multicultural/gender fair work by Northwest AEA's equity coordinator. The equity coordinator also serves as the director of human resources and leads an active Equity Committee. This committee includes community members and provides insight and support in hiring and operations.

Recommendations:

Interviews and documents indicated that Northwest AEA does not provide many multicultural/gender fair services, but school districts and schools can access materials from outside sources, such as Iowa Association of School Boards and School Administrators of Iowa. The site visiting team recommends that the AEA use the [Equity Education resource on the Department's website](#).

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 Northwest AEA desk audit and interviews indicated that Northwest AEA has services to districts and schools. Examples include:

- provided behavior support by hiring three school social workers who are shared by the Northwest AEA and nine local school districts
- AEA's chief administrator to conduct a facility feasibility study for a local school district
- the AEA's executive director of finance provides support to superintendents and school district business offices

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

## Conclusion

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