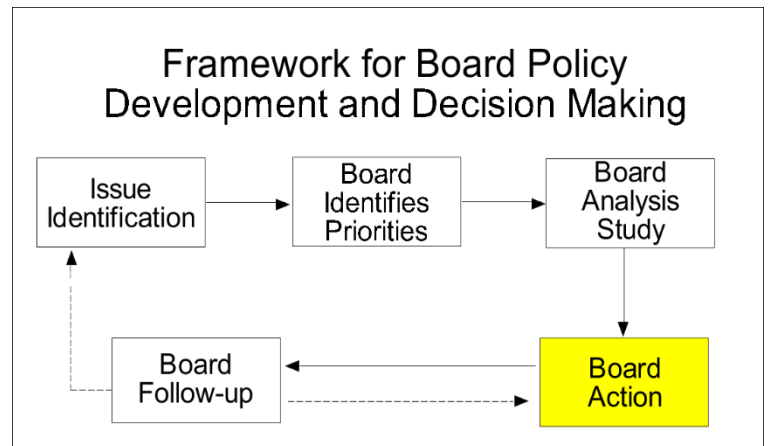


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

November 16, 2022



Agenda Item: Prairie Lakes 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 Prairie Lakes 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.

Prairie Lakes 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

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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.

Prairie Lakes AEA Service Area Data:

- 38 public school districts
- 13 nonpublic schools
- 34,055 students, preschool through grade 12
- 3 comprehensive schools
- 26 targeted schools
- 235.59 total staff members
- Covers 7,875 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, Prairie Lakes AEA is working to implement a comprehensive improvement plan. For example, the AEA is prioritizing a professional learning community culture by aligning the standards of schools, school districts, the AEA and the Department. The AEA has titled this project “Standards of Excellence.”

Prairie Lakes AEA’s strategic plan also ensures that schools and school districts are moving in the same direction to make sure all students are “Future Ready.” This work includes the use of the “Prairie Lakes AEA Field Guide.” This guide supports the agency in offering equitable, efficient and effective educational services across Prairie Lakes AEA.

Interviewees and documents also attest to the agency’s use of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Schools, school districts and Prairie Lakes AEA use MTSS to build capacity and

success. For example, agency consultants and schools work together to review school data and determine available resources to meet student needs.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. School-Community Planning:

Strengths:

Interview group members mentioned the great relationships created between schools and their Prairie Lakes AEA consultants. Similar assertions were made in supporting documents. This interpersonal work, conducted through a needs assessment, reflects the strength of Prairie Lakes AEA in conducting curriculum network meetings and superintendent huddles.

Both interviewees and written materials cited Chief Administrator Susie Meade as a strong leader who engages both internally with agency staff, and externally with school districts. She has a holistic understanding of how to create and maintain a strong support system within Prairie Lakes AEA and at the school district level.

Recommendations:

Interviewees said Prairie Lakes AEA should continue to assist school districts with analyzing and interpreting data. The site visit team recommends the AEA support school districts in discerning which data is important, why they are looking at it and how they might use the information in decision-making to increase student academic progress.

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:

Both documents and interviewees noted collaborative AEA teams meet with each of their assigned school districts, and have conversations to help the agency better understand the school districts' professional needs. To that end, Prairie Lakes AEA also offers a multitude of professional development opportunities to meet all school district and staff needs. Furthermore, the agency uses registration data to determine additional service offerings, and to be more purposeful with onboarding staff and explaining their training expectations.

Recommendations:

Interviewees indicated schools and school districts need more professional development training options for social-emotional behavioral health issues. They also noted that professional development opportunities must be scheduled outside school hours due to the lack of substitute teachers. The site visit team encourages the AEA to explore additional social-emotional behavioral professional development opportunities, and to review offering professional development outside school hours.

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:

AEA school improvement facilitators continue to guide school districts in determining new curricula, according to interview group members and documentary evidence. These facilitators are working with districts to select evidence-based strategies when selecting curriculum and intervention programs. Prairie Lakes AEA regularly provides literacy, math and science development to schools.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA utilize its school improvement facilitators to assist its sole preschool support consultant with the dissemination of preschool information. Doing so would help the AEA to better meet the needs of area preschool teachers.

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

A. Students with Disabilities:

Strengths:

Interviewees and supporting documents demonstrate that special education considerations are incorporated into general education initiatives, practices and tools. Special education representatives also participate in joint decision-making with school districts and families, in meeting student needs.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. English Language Learners:

Strengths:

Interviewees mentioned Prairie Lakes AEA offered partnerships and professional development opportunities to schools and school districts. For example, the AEA conducted networking opportunities with school districts that share similar English learner demographics.

Supporting documents bear out this assertion. Furthermore, consultants received extensive training on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21). This system is a tool for data-driven program evaluation and planning.

Recommendations:

The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA provide additional support for school districts as the number of second language students increases. In that vein, the agency should consider providing collaborative, virtual meetings between school districts with similar English language needs.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Gifted and Talented:

Strengths:

Documents indicate Prairie Lakes AEA has support available to assess and to audit current programming, and to develop a handbook for gifted and talented services.

Recommendations:

Rural school districts are struggling to recruit gifted and talented-endorsed teachers to work with limited students and resources. The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA continue locating opportunities and programming for gifted students to share with schools.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Section 504:

Strengths:

Documents indicate Prairie Lakes AEA has a Section 504 contact person and resources available to each AEA consultant.

Recommendations:

Per interviews and documents, agency consultants and school districts expressed a need for more professional development to have a firm understanding of Section 504 and how it differs from an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA follow up on these suggestions.

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:

Documents state that Prairie Lakes AEA has put much effort into publicizing their media services through brochures, guides, a school district directory and a “Standards of Excellence” handbook.

The agency, in partnership with Northwest AEA, has an increased number of materials and equipment available to school districts and schools. This partnership lessens the burden on school districts to budget for these items.

Recommendations:

Interviewees and documents suggest Prairie Lakes AEA should continue to share the available materials and equipment with school districts and schools. The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA follow up on these suggestions.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

B. Technology:

Strengths:

Interviewees noted Prairie Lakes AEA has a new “one-click” system that allows schools to check out materials quickly and efficiently. In addition, the AEA provided immediate online support and networking to schools and school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Documentary evidence supports these statements.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

C. Leadership:

Strengths:

Interview groups noted that Chief Administrator Meade works with schools and school districts however they prefer: one-on-one, as a small group or as a large group. She aligns herself to be a “listening partner” to build relationships across school districts. There are also monthly superintendent meetings as well as weekly superintendent huddles to give school district leaders an opportunity to ask questions and collaborate with one another.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations in this area at this time.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

D. Multicultural/Gender Fair:

Strengths:

Interviewees and documents indicate the agency is updating and revising its affirmative action plan.

Recommendations:

Based on interviews and a review of supporting documentation, the site visit team concludes there is a general lack of understanding and Prairie Lakes AEA support regarding multicultural/gender fair. The site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA update its affirmative action plan to ensure the needs of the AEA are met.

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:

Per discussions with interview groups and documentary evidence, several services are available to school districts as needed, such as superintendent services, staff sharing and a school district or school-based needs assessment.

Recommendations:

Based on a review of documents and discussions with interviewees, the site visit team recommends that Prairie Lakes AEA increase education and communication regarding the types of management services the agency provides to school districts and schools.

Standard Met/Not Met:

The standard is met.

Conclusion

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