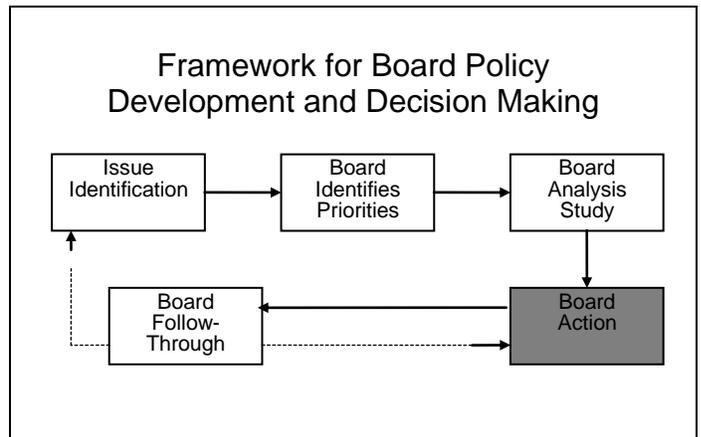


# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

September 16, 2010



**Agenda Item:** Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (AEA) Accreditation

**Iowa Goal:** All K-12 students will achieve at a high level.

**Equity Impact Statement:** Each AEA is required to address and support agency standards on multicultural, gender-fair approaches and meeting the diverse educational needs of students in their agency's Comprehensive Improvement Plan and in the services provided to local education agencies.

**Presenters:** Tom Cooley, School Improvement Consultant and AEA Site Visit Team Co-leader  
Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services

Sharon Hawthorne, Special Education Consultant and AEA Site Visit Team Co-leader  
Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

**Attachments:** 1

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board approve the recommendations for AEA accreditation submitted by the Director and grant continued accreditation for Mississippi Bend AEA.

**Background:** Chapter 273.9 of the Code of Iowa provides authority for the State Board of Education to set standards and procedures for the accreditation of AEAs. These standards and procedures are contained in Chapter 72 of Iowa Administrative Code.

This report will focus on the findings provided by the visitation team for Mississippi Bend AEA.



## Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency Accreditation Summary 2010

### Site Visit Focus

The central purpose of the accreditation visit is to help Area Education Agencies (AEAs) improve the quality and focus of their services, which will in turn assist schools and school districts to improve learning for students. Iowa's AEAs are a critical part of the support structure for schools and ultimately for children. With so much at stake, maintaining high standards or quality in programs and services is a top priority.

Onsite visits are an essential part of the AEA accreditation process. AEA site visits conducted during the school year reflect the requirements outlined in 281—IAC Chapter 72. As a result, the following procedures were applied:

- Assessment of the eight accreditation standards through review of their associated descriptors:
  - 1) School-Community Planning,
  - 2) Professional Development,
  - 3) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment,
  - 4) Diverse Learner Needs,
  - 5) Media,
  - 6) School Technology,
  - 7) Multicultural, Gender Fair, and
  - 8) Leadership
- Assessment of common criteria that apply to each standard:
  - 1) Agency services are equitably available.
  - 2) The agency includes a process to monitor implementation of the services.
  - 3) The agency has a process to measure the effectiveness of services provided.
  - 4) The agency has a process to measure the efficiency of services provided.
- Assessment of the services provided for established agency-wide goals.

### Site Visit Desired Results

- The agency can address accreditation expectations.
- The agency can consistently deliver services that, in aggregate, meet the eight accreditation standards.
- The agency can use the site visit findings to continuously improve the quality of services to positively impact student learning.

### Levels of Accreditation Pursuant to 281—IAC 72.11(4)

Accreditation applies to the entire agency, not to individual programs, services, or actions. 281—IAC Chapter 72 designates two accreditation options:

- **The State Board of Education grants Continuation of Accreditation** if the agency meets all standards and other requirements.
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## Mississippi Bend AGENCY Summary of Findings

AGENCY Accreditation Standards	Met or Not Met
School-Community Planning	<b>Met</b>
Professional Development	<b>Met</b>
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	<b>Met</b>
Diverse Learner Needs	<b>Met</b>
Multicultural/Gender Fair	<b>Met</b>
Media	<b>Met</b>
School Technology	<b>Met</b>
Leadership	<b>Met</b>

Note: The AEA 9 Shelter School and the Scott County Juvenile Detention Center shelter/programs were reviewed as a part of the agency's accreditation visit. Review of self-assessment data provided to the site visit team prior to the visit indicated compliance with all the program requirements of 281—IAC Chapter 63.

## Agency-Wide Areas of Strength

1. Agency and local education agency (LEA) interviewees consistently described the agency as service oriented. Example services include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Professional development for the Iowa Core strands
  - Work with districts regarding School in Need of Assistance (SINA) and District in Need of Assistance (DINA) designations
  - Various academies (e.g. Principal Leadership, Counselors, Gifted/Talented, Technology, and Early Childhood)
  - Content Area Teacher Networks (CATNs) (e.g., Reading, Math, and Science)
  - Elmore Network and School Improvement Network
  
2. Agency and LEA interviewees described the agency's media and technology services as "top notch." The agency provides support to LEAs through:
  - holding trainings for new district librarians,
  - providing training in the use of Cognitive Tutor, e-Walk, and SMART™ Boards,
  - providing support for LEA media/school technology staff through groups such as:
    - the Technology Coordinator Group,
    - Media Academy,
    - Media Advisory Group, and
    - Assistive Technology Team.
  - modeling use of technology by agency staff
  - assisting students by training LEA staff how to use emerging technology, such as:
    - U-Video cameras with parents of preschool special education children to reflect on practices with families
    - iPods with speech and language students
    - iMovie application for social studies classes

3. Interviewees indicated the agency is beginning to embrace the use of data to guide agency decisions. Examples include:
  - Tailoring professional development offerings to needs identified through data
  - Focusing content of the Principal Leadership Academy (PLA) on data analysis
  - Creating agreements through the Accelerating Student Achievement Pilot (ASAP) process
  - Encouraging and training LEA staff to gather and use implementation data

### **Agency-wide Suggested Areas of Improvement**

1. Although most LEA interviewees expressed satisfaction with agency services, others expressed concerns over how services are allocated across the area served by the agency. The agency is encouraged to communicate the process by which allocation decisions are made to agency personnel and LEAs and explore ways to ensure services are consistently and transparently provided to all parts of the agency. Although some concerns might be addressed/clarified through the planned expansion of the ASAP process, the agency is encouraged to consider the following actions:
  - Develop a timeline for LEAs to communicate needs to the agency to better inform the agency's planning process.
  - Develop a decision-making flow chart or similar tool to provide greater clarity regarding how internal decisions regarding service offerings are made.
2. Agency and LEA interviewees expressed concerns about communication between the agency and LEAs. Examples topics included:
  - changes in agency staff assignments to buildings
  - loss of ASAP facilitators
  - agency responsibilities (i.e., required staff meetings for agency personnel) and the impact on services to LEAs
  - inconsistency of agency responses (i.e., one question gets different answers)Agency interviewees also expressed concerns about communication *within* the agency. Examples included:
  - awareness of agency-wide goals and progress toward meeting these goals
  - agency responsibilities and the impact on service to LEAs
  - inconsistency of information shared with and among internal staff
  - cross-integrated services platforms communicationAs the agency shifts to its new delivery model, clear, consistent, and frequent communication will be critical. The team recommends that the agency review its communication process and develop a communication plan to address both internal and external concerns. The agency might also consider developing a decision making protocol to help staff prioritize LEA needs with agency needs. Contact Sue Daker, Director of Comprehensive Improvement at Keystone Area Education Agency (AEA 1) for an example protocol ([sdaker@aea1.k12.ia.us](mailto:sdaker@aea1.k12.ia.us) or 563-245-1480).
3. Few LEA and agency interviewees were able to articulate the agency-wide goals beyond improved proficiency in reading, math, and science. The team recommends the agency explore ways to better communicate its goals to all stakeholders, review implications of the goals on agency decision making, and facilitate understanding of the goals as they relate to job roles of agency personnel. In addition, analysis of goal-related data should indicate what difference agency services have made for the student populations specified within the goals.

## **Standard I – School-Community Planning**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency interviewees cited strong early childhood programming supports and described work conducted with parents, the empowerment agencies, and community partners, including mental health services, tutoring, and community specific organizations such as Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Corp of Engineers, Family Museum, John Deere, St. Ambrose University, and Iowa State University.
2. Agency and LEA interviewees described assistance for developing shared vision through planning, leadership teams, and data analysis as a positive function of the agency. For example, the PLA expanded to include teacher leaders in the data analysis process (expanding leadership teams beyond principals). Other examples include assistance with the District Developed Special Education Plan, facilitating discussions regarding whole grade sharing, and supporting special education audits.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. Multiple agency interview groups stated, “We never say no” regarding providing services; however, some LEA interviewees indicated this may not be the case. This might contribute to a feeling expressed by agency and LEA interviewees that agency personnel are “stretched too thin.” The team recommends the agency consider reviewing its policy for providing services in order to determine when it might be appropriate to guide districts in a direction more closely aligned with agency goals and services. The agency might also benefit from the following:
  - Maintain a focus on building LEA capacity.
  - Clarify, internally and externally, agency expectations regarding provision of agency services to LEAs.
  - Review the number of services provided in relation to the staff available to provide ongoing support of these services. Practice “selective abandonment” of services that lack evidence of effectiveness and low or decreasing levels of LEA participation.
  - Clearly communicate to internal staff and LEAs the rationale for adopting new or discontinuing past services.
  - Continue to be sensitive to the perception held by some LEAs that differences exist regarding service availability and support depending on the LEA’s location.

## **Standard II – Professional Development**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. LEA and agency interviewees reported the amount of professional development delivered through the agency at the regional (sector) and building level is increasing. Gathering of implementation data is often supported by agency resources, such as development and administration of surveys and assistance with developing implementation logs. In some cases when professional development opportunities are offered in various agency sectors, trainers conduct follow-up meetings and classroom visits with participants to address implementation of acquired skills at the classroom level.

2. Multiple LEA staff interviewed shared that a variety of professional development opportunities are presented following the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM). These include those delivered collaboratively by Quality Learning and Special Education staff. Several groups reported that the research behind strategies is presented during the initial sessions. The agency also brings in nationally recognized speakers who provide research and foundation information to attendees. This is something LEAs would not be able to afford on their own.
3. LEA and agency interviewees reported the agency is providing increasing amounts of professional development customized to an LEA's identified needs. Interviewees reported the following professional growth opportunities based on the needs of specific groups:
  - Leadership professional development: PLA; Elmore (i.e., Instructional Rounds training); and eWalk training
  - CATNs for Reading and Math and Science
  - Counselor Academy; Technology Academy; Media Academy; Gifted and Talented (G/T) Academy; and Comprehensive School Improvement Network (CSIN)
  - Teacher professional development: Lesson study approach partnering with Loras College; Differentiated instruction; 6+1 Traits of Writing; Kathy Richardson training for primary math assessment; Every Learner Inquires (ELI); Second Chance Reading, Co-teaching; Formative Assessment; progress monitoring using AIMSweb<sup>®</sup>; and Every Student Counts (ESC)
  - Paraprofessional professional development: Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI<sup>®</sup>) Non-violent Crisis Intervention Program; Early Childhood Academy; Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus); Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)/Program-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PWPBIS); and paraeducator certification
  - Community partners: Early Childhood Academy; Olweus; PBIS/PWPBIS.
  - Agency staff: departmental and agency meetings

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. Agency and LEA interviewees reported inconsistencies in how the agency gathers and analyzes implementation data following professional development (e.g., type, amount, and use of data). It is recommend the agency conduct deeper data analysis to determine if the strategies it is supporting through professional development are effective in improving student achievement with the specific subgroups identified within its agency-wide goals.
2. LEA interviewees reported a lack of consistency among the individuals within the agency responsible for delivery of professional development (e.g., presentation skills, respect for participants, professionalism, and depth of knowledge). A common comment was, "We check to see who the presenter will be and then decide about participation." The agency is encouraged to implement measures to ensure professional development is consistently delivered by quality providers; those demonstrating depth of knowledge of and experience with the given topic, presentation skills appropriate to adult learners, effective use of technology for distance learning, and understanding of the change process. This might be accomplished, in part, through mentoring of new trainers and development and use of a consistent set of training materials across the agency.

- Multiple LEA and agency interview groups indicated a desire for the agency to allocate personnel and resources to match those with the greatest needs. The agency might benefit from development and implementation of a systematic approach to match data-based district needs to professional development at the agency, region, district, building, and teacher levels. This would assist in determining how needs can be met collaboratively by LEA and agency staff through identifying priorities and necessary resources, as well as ensuring sustainability.

### **Standard III – Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

#### **Noted Strengths**

- Agency and LEA interview groups noted assistance is available from the agency around a variety of domains, including textbook selection, data analysis, creation and use of formative assessments, and implementation of instructional strategies (e.g., Second Chance Reading, Every Student Counts, Differentiated Instruction, PBIS, Olweus, Reading Recovery, Strategic Instruction Model, and Co-Teaching).

#### **Areas of Recommendation**

- Although agency and LEA interview groups noted LEAs receive help with data analysis, LEA groups also reported a need for additional assistance with determining strategies that have the highest likelihood to improve student achievement in the areas indicated by these data. Specifically, LEAs expressed a need for help in addressing needs of various demographic subgroups, specifically English Language Learners, students at risk, students receiving special education services, and minority populations. Due to changing demographics across the region, it is recommended the agency clarify connections between the strategies selected and results of data analysis.

### **Standard IV – Diverse Learner Needs**

#### **Noted Strengths**

- LEA interviewees described most agency special education staff serving district buildings as capable, competent, and engaged at the student, teacher, and building levels. Interviewees also stated agency staff members were knowledgeable about goal setting, progress monitoring, decision making, and instructional strategies (e.g., co-teaching, direct instruction). Several interviewees reported the agency staff is flexible with scheduling to meet the needs of the students and LEA staff.
- Several LEA and agency interview groups specifically mentioned the depth and breadth of the knowledge base and support provided by the agency's Assistive Technology team. LEA Interviewees appreciated agency purchase of equipment for short term loans for trials to be used with specific students prior to the LEA purchasing the equipment. A wide variety of assistive technology supports (e.g. equipment, software) are available through the agency to meet the needs of students with mild to severe disabilities.

3. Agency interviewees provided several discipline-specific examples regarding support of LEA efforts to increase student achievement in reading and math. Audiology staff reported gathering and analyzing implementation data around the use of classroom amplification systems. School psychologists interviewed reported implementation of co-teaching and instructional strategies related to identified-student needs.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. Concerns were noted by multiple interview groups (LEA and agency) with respect to English as a Second Language (ESL) services and supports. Interviews and a review of documents indicated the agency does have a consultant with approximately thirty percent (30%) their time allocated to address ESL issues. Some districts reported having to seek outside resources to support their needs. Districts would like assistance with being proactive in preparation for the increasingly diverse student population. The team is concerned about the level of staff support to meet LEAs' ESL needs. The agency is encouraged to be mindful of the changing demographics of their student population and be more proactive in terms of instructional practices and support services. To assist in building agency staff capacity to assist LEAs, the agency might consider providing Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model (SIOP) training and training regarding strategies to increase involvement of families/parents of English Language Learners (ELL) in the learning process. Refer to the agency's Equity Report for additional comments regarding this issue (i.e., statements 31 and 32)
2. Internal interviewees reported a G/T consultant provides guidance and technical assistance with LEA site visit preparation. Agency G/T services also provide for periodic updates with resources through a listserv and professional development (e.g., CATN). LEA interviewees, however, described limited agency support in meeting the needs of G/T students and, as a result, they seek support from outside resources (e.g., University of Iowa's Belin-Blank Center). LEA interviewees expressed that needs of highly proficient students are often not addressed within the context of general classroom instruction. The agency is encouraged to support LEA staff in providing learning opportunities for G/T students within the general classroom setting. This might be accomplished by including explicit reference to meeting the needs of high proficiency students within the agency's various initiatives (e.g., Differentiated Instruction). Refer to the agency's Equity Report for additional comments regarding G/T supports (i.e., statement 47)
3. Limited information was provided by interview groups or in the document review on what the agency is specifically doing to address the unique needs of diverse learners: those identified in the two agency-wide goals. Interviewees did address a number of professional development initiatives focusing on instructional practices which are effective for all students; however, it did not appear implementation or ongoing formative data are being analyzed for specific subgroups to determine if the instructional practices being implemented are effective. There is a need to utilize disaggregated data to make effective instructional decisions. In addition, the agency could assist LEAs with analyzing their disaggregated data and reporting progress to its stakeholders (e.g. internal and external).

4. Several interviewee groups (agency and LEA) reported concerns about the changing roles and responsibilities of special education staff in the following areas:
  - Working with at-risk students
  - Assignments/re-assignments (e.g., formula and communication)
  - General education interventions
  - Child Find
  - Inconsistency between staff member abilities and the skills/competence needed to fulfill assigned roles
  - Providing professional development
  - Professionalism (interviewees expressed concern regarding dress code, hours, and absences)
  - Prioritizing attendance when conflicting duties arise
  - Meeting the needs of students on the autism spectrum

Agency leadership is encouraged to develop a communication plan to address the above areas of concern; not only with agency staff, but also with the districts/buildings they serve. In addition, participation on special education statewide committees (e.g., Child Find, professional development, compliance, and IEP) would provide current and accurate information which may guide discussions and procedural decisions.

5. The issue of sustainability, high caseloads, and adequate staffing levels for Early ACCESS were identified by AEA interviewees. Interviewees indicated a short term plan for addressing these concerns is in place. The agency is encouraged to supplement this plan through initiation of long term sustainability planning.
6. The site visit team was concerned about the lack of cohesiveness, shared knowledge, and collaboration shown by the Early ACCESS (Part C) interviewees during the interview. It is recommended that agency special education leadership regularly communicate about Early ACCESS, review and “drill down” Early ACCESS data, identify the “story behind the baseline,” and conduct necessary improvement planning.

## **Standard V – Multicultural, Gender Fair**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Document review and interviews with LEA and agency staffs indicated Olweus and PBIS/PWPBIS training has been provided to most districts to address student behavioral concerns, including bullying and harassment, and to address the “Safe Schools” legislation.
2. LEA and agency interviewees stated Media Services assist LEAs in textbook and material selections to ensure materials are sensitive to multicultural, gender fair issues. Media purchases support PreK-12 books in multiple languages, diverse family structures, and other issues related to diversity.
3. Agency interviewees reported applications to provide courses for professional development submitted by presenters must have a connection to and infusion of multicultural, gender fair (MCGF) concepts. Materials are selected to support the increasingly diverse student populations residing within the agency’s boundaries. Refer the agency’s Equity Report for additional comments regarding this area of strength (i.e., statements 13 and 23).

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. While the agency has adopted a policy supportive of MCGF education and has updated its non-discrimination policy, comments from agency and LEA interviewees indicated additional work is needed in this area. Responses to questions regarding MCGF topics tended to be limited in scope, focusing on poverty training and Olweus. Agency staff would benefit from deeper understanding of various aspects of diversity (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and socio-economic status) and cultural competence. Consider expanding the experiences available to agency staff through the following suggestions:
  - Create a common definition for cultural competence and discuss implications for the agency and its practices.
  - Develop a broader view of diversity, including a thorough examination of the demographics of the LEAs served by the agency.
  - Develop list of supports and resources available to agency staff (including websites such as [http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q\\_integrated.htm](http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q_integrated.htm)).

These actions would better prepare agency staff to meet the needs of LEAs by infusing aspects of diversity and cultural competence into trainings related to effective instructional practices and leadership.

## **Standard VI – Media and Standard VII – School Technology**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency and LEA interviewees cited a number of positive services provided by the agency in the areas of media and school technology. These included, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Proactive, knowledgeable, up-to-date, budget conscious, and responsive technology staff
  - Media Academy for LEA teacher librarians and instructional technology personnel
  - Media resources to support instruction, professional growth, and MCGF issues
  - Reliable van services
  - On-line resources for students, teachers, and agency staff, such as Iowa AEA Online and Moodle
  - Support of and opportunities for distance learning and collaboration (e.g., use of Skype™ and Adobe® Connect™ Pro)
  - Training in the use of technology for instruction (added value for student learning)

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. LEA interviewees reported the agency's technology staff has been proactive in many ways, including finding cutting edge tools and bringing these new technologies to the attention of the district technology staff. Interviewees noted, however, the recent Microsoft settlement brought several issues to their attention, such as the need for improved technology planning. It is recommended the agency continue to be proactive by assisting districts and schools to purposefully plan for the integration of instructional technology. The planning process might include topics such as predicting LEA bandwidth needs, one-to-one laptop initiatives, use of interactive white boards, technology audits, and early childhood center technology needs.

## Standard VIII – Leadership

### Noted Strengths

1. LEA interviewees expressed appreciation of professional development provided for school leaders. Principal Leadership Academy (Data Teams), Superintendents' Network (Instructional Rounds), curriculum directors' meetings were frequently mentioned as being beneficial. Interviewees were also appreciative of the use of technology to connect with leaders over distance (e.g., Adobe® Connect™ Pro) and to collect data (e.g., Palms). LEA interviewees reported the work the agency has done to develop teacher leaders has had a positive effect (e.g., Building Leadership Teams, Teacher Leadership Academy, Iowa Core Leadership Training, Principal Leadership Academy, and Olweus training).
2. Agency and LEA interviewees appreciated the agency's efforts to bring in national speakers connected to district efforts to increase student achievement. Specifically mentioned were Bob Marzano, Richard Elmore (expanded state-wide), Todd Whitaker, Doug Reeves, and Tony Wagner.

### Areas of Recommendation

1. LEA interviewees expressed an appreciation for distance learning and collaboration when it was offered; however, concerns were expressed about the cost of travel to agency sponsored events and the amount of time LEA staff members must be out of their schools to attend. While the agency has been cognizant of and responsive to these concerns, it is encouraged to investigate further use of technology to provide professional learning and collaboration opportunities. In addition, to support the use of these technologies, the agency is encouraged to continue providing training on the use of distance learning tools to increase the skills of agency and LEA staffs.

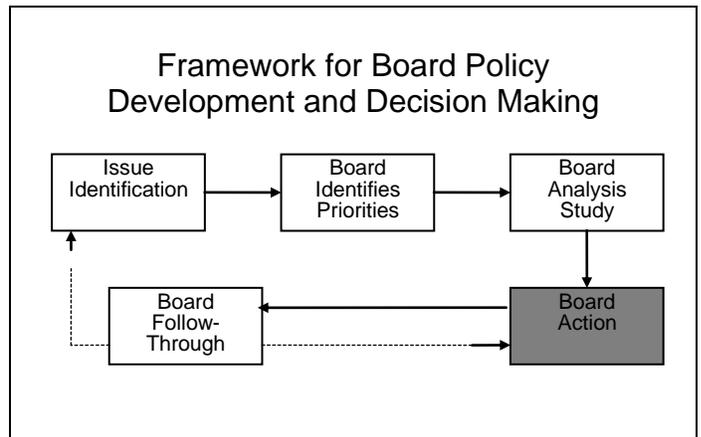
## Accreditation Status: Mississippi Bend AEA

Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency is recommended for **continued accreditation** pursuant to 281—IAC Chapter 72.

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

September 16, 2010



**Agenda Item:** Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA) Accreditation

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Sharon Hawthorne, Special Education Consultant and AEA Site Visit Team Co-leader  
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**Attachments:** 1

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**Background:** Chapter 273.9 of the Code of Iowa provides authority for the State Board of Education to set standards and procedures for the accreditation of AEAs. These standards and procedures are contained in Chapter 72 of Iowa Administrative Code.

This report will focus on the findings provided by the visitation team for Heartland AEA.



## Heartland Area Education Agency Accreditation Summary 2010

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## Heartland AEA Summary of Findings

AEA Accreditation Standards	Met or Not Met
School-Community Planning	<b>Met</b>
Professional Development	<b>Met</b>
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	<b>Met</b>
Diverse Learner Needs	<b>Met</b>
Multicultural/Gender Fair	<b>Met</b>
Media	<b>Met</b>
School Technology	<b>Met</b>
Leadership	<b>Met</b>

Note: The Rosedale, Youth Emergency Shelter and Services (YESS), Polk County Shelter, Polk County Juvenile Detention Center, South Central Youth and Family Services (SCYFS), Quakerdale of Manning, and Quakerdale of Newton shelter/programs were reviewed as a part of the agency’s accreditation visit. Review of self-assessment data provided to the site visit team prior to the visit indicated compliance with all the program requirements of 281—IAC Chapter 63.

## Agency-Wide Areas of Strength

1. As a result of feedback gathered through interviews with agency and local education agency (LEA) staff members, the visiting team identified following areas as agency-wide strengths. Details regarding these areas are including within the various standards sections within this report.
  - Agency Media Services
  - Agency Technology Services
  - Heartland Educational Assessment Resource Toolbox (HEART database)
  - Content Area capacity Building (CAB) project
  
2. Agency interviewees reported the agency’s Partnership Director Model addresses the relationships between the agency and LEAs. Partnership Directors are building their capacity to better understand the needs of LEAs and the various service areas within the AEA. Agency special education and Early ACCESS management interviewees reported they feel comfortable asking to attend Partnership Directors’ meetings to address special education and Early ACCESS.

## Agency-wide Suggested Areas of Improvement

1. LEA interviewees were unsure of communication of data from surveys (e.g. Customer Survey). The agency is encouraged to communicate survey results through multiple venues, including its website, newsletter, and staff meetings.

2. Although agency staff indicated the agency's Partnership Director Model addresses the relationships between the agency and LEAs, there isn't a consistent understanding of the Partnership Director Model among all agency and LEA staff. Some of the misunderstandings include:

- Partnership Directors being spread too thin
- Special education taking too much of Partnership Directors' time
- Some Partnership Directors do not have a special education background
- Perception of sacrificing social worker positions to allow for Partnership Director positions
- Inconsistency regarding Partnership Director involvement with LEAs

To help develop shared understanding, the agency is encouraged to consider the following actions:

- Communicate difference in current delivery structure.
- Develop common expectations for the Partnership Director role and communicate those expectations internally and externally.
- Monitor implementation of the Partnership Director role on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure LEA staffs are familiar with the Partnership Director assigned to their area (e.g., have the Partnership Director meet with building staffs in addition to administrative teams).

## **Standard I – School-Community Planning**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency staff reported using a common practice for school/community planning with LEAs. The practice includes conversations with LEA partners about data, reviewing collaborative actions around LEA goals and then assisting LEAs in meeting their goals. Examples included the following:
- Working collaboratively with a school district to develop questions for a district needs assessment. Agency staff facilitated responses from school and community participants and then identified themes.
  - Working closely with districts in an ongoing process focused on district needs identified through analysis of student achievement data. For the mathematics area, agency staff worked to align LEA needs with agency services to ensure LEAs have the professional development and tools needed to improve student achievement.
  - Developing a district needs assessment and obtaining information about how outside and community agencies, districts, and the AEA interact regarding students with challenging behaviors, then visiting about how to intervene. One question focused on how often outside and community resources work together to address students with challenging behaviors. Data revealed it was limited. Agency and local school district staff are now working together to resolve this issue.
  - Collaborating on a monthly basis with Warren County school districts and community resource agencies to identify student needs and engage in problem solving.
  - Providing facilitation for a local district to assist in determining the most effective and efficient use of its buildings.

2. LEA and agency interviewees reported agency assessment consultants assist LEAs to review and analyze district/school-wide assessments. The agency staff guides LEAs in use of these data in the school improvement process, including the use of community data for planning. Agency assistance reaches the building level through assisting principals in data review and planning.
3. Agency and LEA interviewees reported Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) training and the follow-up provided by the agency is a strength. Interviewees from multiple LEAs described the various supports provided from the agency for PBIS. A few of the specific examples are listed below:
  - Training includes a module focused on school/community involvement, including how to access resources.
  - Trainings have moved from the awareness level to deeper understanding and application of community resources.
  - Agency staff is assisting districts to address the intensive behavior needs of some students.
  - Agency staff worked with a local school district experiencing an inconsistent system in dealing with student issues such as tardiness, absences, and more serious behaviors. The staff provided training based on the district's data and assisted in establishing a record keeping system for student behaviors.
4. The agency's Curriculum Network was cited by agency and LEA staff as an effective support. For example, LEAs without a designated curriculum coordinator receive assistance in gathering information about best practices, current trends, and state and federal initiatives related to curriculum. Through the assistance of Curriculum Network, LEA staff members in larger districts are prepared to demonstrate best practices, model for teachers, and work in classrooms to offer feedback to teachers. The networking aspect of the group provides opportunities for participants to engage in professional conversations that develop leadership for curriculum in schools.
5. Agency staff indicated they serve on LEA School in Need of Assistance (SINA) and School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) teams. This provides connection with the LEAs and their communities to focus on student improvement. LEA interviewees noted the SINA audit and design process is also made available to non-identified schools/districts as a proactive approach to improving student achievement.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. The agency has a Parent Partnership Pilot Project that currently involves two regional sites. The purpose of the Parent Partnership pilot is to improve communication between parents and schools, provide an overview of agency services, and seek input from participants regarding what additional services are needed from the agency. The pilot is building relationships early in the special education process and is looking at different way to help parents. As the agency moves forward in its mission, consider the benefit of expanding the Parent Partnership Project to additional districts to continue engaging collaboratively with parents of children with special needs, including the area of autism. When dissenting opinions arise, the Parent Partnerships could supplement existing agency processes to resolve issues (e.g., the AEA Resolution Facilitator process).

2. The agency's early childhood staff members are working and contracting with national research partners (i.e., Juniper Gardens Children's Project, University of Kansas; Ohio State University; University of Minnesota; and Dynamic Measurement Group (DMG), Eugene, Oregon). The agency is encouraged to continue building these relationships to improve instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring of "tier 2" and "tier 3" interventions within Instructional Decision Making (IDM).

## Standard II – Professional Development

### Noted Strengths

1. Many LEA and agency interviewees reported that professional development delivered externally and internally is aligned with the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM). Review of data from multiple sources (e.g., HEART Database, Iowa Youth Survey, and Protocol for Evaluating School-wide Academics), implementation review, observation, and consultation were apparent.
2. According to agency and LEA interview groups, professional development for reading was embedded within the Instructional Decision Making (IDM) process. Agency staff members are partners with LEA staff in planning and facilitating the professional development in buildings.
3. Multiple interview groups reported effective use of technology by the agency to deliver professional development, an understanding of what technologies are available to use within the classroom, and how to integrate technology into classroom instruction. Examples include:
  - Technology Infusion Collaborative (TIC), where teachers showcase to other teachers what they are doing with technology in their classrooms
  - On-line resources such as AEA Online
  - Technology for Iowa Core Curriculum Learning (TICCL), for which agency staff reviews emerging technologies in reading, math and science, and how to use them in the classroom. They focus on learning tools that support school curriculums K-12.
  - Use of podcasting, webcasting, and Web 2.0 tools
  - Use of Webinars, Skype™, and Moodle-based classes, resulting in diminished need for travel
4. Multiple interview groups reported administrators of LEAs choosing to participate are expected to be part of science, math, and reading CAB projects. This helps them to understand and monitor professional development strategies being implemented by their teachers.
5. According to multiple interview groups, the agency is aware of current trends and research-based practices and designs professional development based on these initiatives and the needs of LEAs. Examples of research-based practices provided by interviewees included the following: Differentiated Instruction, Cognitively Guided Instruction, Instructional Decision-Making, Every Learner Inquires, and Every Student Counts.
6. Many agency and LEA interviewees indicated professional development on how to support the needs of diverse learners is provided to agency and LEA staff. Topics have included PBIS, children on the autism spectrum, child find, cultural competence, English Language Learners (ELL), and gifted and talented (G/T) education. Additionally, LEA interviewees reported the agency provides one-on-one support in understanding how to meet the unique needs of specific students (e.g., challenging behavior).

7. Agency interviewees reported the agency staff engages in monthly “lunch and learns” focused on different topics and issues related to the agency’s cultural competence goal. These professional development opportunities are recorded and made available in each regional office.
8. Multiple LEA interviewees shared that professional development opportunities provided through the agency are available to all LEAs regardless of size or location. The agency has a staff position dedicated to providing support to accredited non-public schools.
9. The agency special education staff interviewees reported making data based decisions to drive internal and external professional development. Some of the data sources used for these decisions included progress monitoring of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, Curriculum Based Evaluations, and I-STAR. Examples of the professional development offerings included goal setting, progress monitoring procedures, and effective goal writing. The Early ACCESS (EA) staff is engaged in the same decision making process and has adjusted the process to work for EA.
10. Special education interviewees reported the agency has provided “Polishing our Practice” training to internal special education and Early ACCESS staff. Participants in this training learn how to make data based decisions. Professional development was also provided for each region in the agency based on participants’ self-evaluations of individual cases during the “Polishing Our Practice” training.

#### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. Some LEA interviewees indicated the agency’s evaluation process should better identify professional development providers who do not provide quality professional development. In order to ensure consistent delivery of quality professional development, the agency is encouraged to supplement its review of surveys completed by participants with periodic observation of professional development delivery by supervisors. This might assist the agency to identify individual presenters who would benefit from further skill development and coaching and/or areas in which all agency presenters might benefit from ongoing training and support.
2. While the implementation component of the IPDM was in place in numerous professional development offerings, such as reading, math, and PBIS, LEA and agency interviewees reported implementation was a not strong component in the science CAB. For example, implementation data from teacher lessons was not collected or analyzed. As a result, agency staff and LEA teachers are unsure of the impact of the science CAB on the achievement of students. The agency is encouraged to use its program evaluation framework to ensure the science CAB is having a positive impact on student achievement. Additionally, while some LEA interviewees reported a special educator supported their understanding of differentiation of instruction for struggling learners, this was provided during just one CAB session. It is suggested the agency provide on-going support from a special educator throughout the science CAB sessions. It would also be beneficial for the agency to review implementation requirements of science CAB participants and use these data to inform future professional development decisions.

3. While multiple reading interviewees commented that reading and IDM were integrated as opposed to IDM being offered as a standalone process, there was marked absence of comments regarding any specific reading strategies, interventions, or programs used/taught in the context of IDM. These omissions may indicate a lack of understanding of how/when to tie specific instructional strategies and interventions to the IDM process. The agency is encouraged to discuss this observation with staff members involved with training and implementation of IDM.

## **Standard III – Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency and LEA interviewees commended the agency's continual expansion of the HEART database in order to meet the needs of the LEAs (e.g., the addition of DIBELS and behavioral data). LEA interviewees identified the HEART database as the main tool for data analysis. Agency and LEA interviewees described continued professional development opportunities on the use of the database for curriculum, instruction and assessment decisions. During site visit team discussions, it was noted the HEART database is also available to and appreciated by other AEAs.
2. LEA and agency interviewees reported the emphasis on use of the IDM process has provided agency staff and LEA teachers and administrators with a common vocabulary and assistance with data analysis. This has helped LEA and agency staffs to better describe and understand student achievement.
3. LEA and agency interviewees indicated the hiring of additional assessment consultants has provided a significant service for LEAs. The consultants have been helpful in analyzing data from a systematic perspective and have worked with agency content specialists to better meet the needs of LEAs. The support has included the analysis of assessments beyond Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED), including the Iowa Collaborative Assessment Modules (ICAM) and State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS).
4. Agency and LEA interviewees stated the agency's staff has been helpful in preparing for the implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum (e.g., providing Leadership Modules, Iowa Core Institute, Iowa Curriculum Alignment Tool (ICAT), and other alignment tools). In addition, the agency's Professional Learning and Leadership Consultants (PLLC) participate in LEA Iowa Core Leadership Teams.
5. During the 2009-2010 school year, Heartland AEA was one of three AEAs piloting use of an online assessment system, *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming Interactive System for Infants and Children* (AEPSi), to support Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Education staff in designing instruction based on assessment and progress monitoring data. The agency will report data to the Iowa Department of Education (DE) about the number of children served, child outcomes, and strengths, challenges, and benefits of the AEPSi in designing instruction.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. LEA interviewees indicated use of the IDM model is not as prevalent at the secondary level as it is at the elementary level. It is recommended the agency continue to explore implementation of IDM principles by assisting LEAs to utilize the core, supplemental, and intensive levels of instruction at the secondary level.
2. LEA and agency interviewees described some initiatives provided through the agency to improve instruction. Examples included the support of Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) and the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). It is recommended the agency expand use of AIW, PLC, and additional strategies to enhance the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to increase student achievement and decrease achievement gaps.
3. LEA interviewees acknowledged the Science CAB project as an effective process to “roll out” K-12 Every Learner Inquires. Interviewees reported the involvement of an administrator and the three year commitment from schools provided the integrity for implementation, with each year of participation focusing on a different aspect – from an understanding of the research about inquiry to the implementation of lesson plans within the school setting. The visiting team found that while agency interviewees were aware of the agency-wide goal for science, it was unclear whether staff members understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting this goal. In addition, LEA interviewees reported the science leadership network has not continued and some interviewees reported they were not aware of the Science CAB; therefore, they felt there were limited opportunities for networking among science teachers. It is recommended to consider multiple ways to provide networking opportunities, especially for those LEAs not involved in specific agency initiatives (e.g., IDM, Science CAB, and E2T2).
4. In light of implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum, some LEA interviewees stated a need for additional agency assistance in the selection and use of second assessments (i.e., assessments beyond the Iowa Tests) for reading, math, and science. Consider including this topic in future CAB discussions.
5. Special education interviewees indicated the agency has made efforts to change internal and external staff beliefs that students with special education needs cannot succeed at high levels. It is recommended the agency continue these efforts by exploring additional ways to challenge these beliefs and assist educators to establish high expectations for students with special education needs.

## **Standard IV – Diverse Learner Needs**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. AEA interviewees shared a number of examples of how the agency is integrating cultural competence into its practice. Examples include: lunch and learns, poverty simulations, sensitivity training, and Diversity Day. In addition, the agency offers diversity training/courses specifically designed for LEA administrators and special educators.
2. Agency interviewees reported school psychologists, school social workers, and special education consultants receive training on how to identify whether a non-proficient ELL student has a language proficiency concern or a disability requiring special education services.

3. Multiple LEA and AEA interviewees reported various levels of agency support for high ability learners (i.e., G/T). Examples include:
  - G/T Academy
  - Courses for G/T endorsement
  - District G/T plan support
  - Assessment support
  - Differentiation of Instruction training
  - Assistance in development of “friendship groups” at the LEA level for identified students
  
4. Agency and LEA interview groups reported various supports offered by the agency’s English as a Second Language (ESL) staff. Examples included:
  - providing interpreters
  - school/community activities for awareness of cultural differences
  - interpretation of data from assessments such as Iowa English Language Development Assessment (I-ELDA) and Language Assessment Scale (LAS)
  - collaboration training designed to focus on the full continuum of learners receiving ESL services
  
5. Multiple agency and LEA interviewees reported materials available through the agency’s lending library/media collection and on-line are available in multiple languages, at multiple reading/grade levels, and in multiple formats to meet diverse learner needs.
  
6. Special education interviewees reported the Instant Alarm system has helped agency staff to meet two State Performance Plan indicators that require 100% compliance: B11 – Eligibility determined within 60 days of parental consent for evaluation and C7 – Initial IFSP meeting conducted within Part C’s 45-day timeline. Instant Alarm sends email alerts reminding staff of timelines and is used by partnership directors after the fact to make decisions about supporting staff and future professional development. The system has the capacity to notify EA Service Coordinators employed by the agency’s Part C signatory partners of both data and alerts.
  
7. Special education interviewees reported the agency has implemented many practices to assure students with disabilities who are 14 and older receive transitions services that will allow these students to experience success once they graduate from high school. The percent of compliance within the agency has increased from 1.82% in 2005-06 to 57.08% in 2008-09. Examples included:
  - Agency participation in the State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) for Secondary Transition.
  - Regional trainings to provide information to secondary special education teachers regarding secondary transition requirements and help teachers improve the quality of secondary transition planning.
  - Providing substitute pay so district secondary special education teachers could attend the launch of the Supports for Accommodations Request (SAR) to learn about helping students with disabilities who will be participating in post secondary education request and receive the accommodations they need to succeed.
  - Maintaining a partnership with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). This has pushed the agency to work more closely with DVRS resulting in a common vocabulary and a coordination of the DVRS rubric with the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

## **Areas of Recommendation**

1. While some agency staff interviewees reported the Parent Educator Connection (PEC) provides workshops to help parents understand special education, the IEP process, and transition from Early ACCESS (Part C) to Part B (ages 3-21) and secondary transition from high school to post secondary activities, most LEA interviewees did not know what the PEC was. The agency is encouraged to promote, to agency and LEA staff members, the PEC and the services available to parents.
2. Multiple LEA interviewees reported they appreciate the work that members of the agency's special education staff (e.g., psychologists, social workers, and special education consultants) do to support their programs, teachers, and students; however, they also reported seeing these staff members less often and stated the staff members are "spread too thin." Interviewees also indicated there were not enough school social workers available to meet LEAs' changing needs. For example, interviewees stated there are an increasing number of students with social-emotional and behavioral issues. The agency is encouraged to consider these issues and concerns as resources are allocated.
3. While some LEA interviewees reported there were a variety of tools and strategies available to use within early childhood literacy, the same did not hold true with mathematics. Specifically, interviewees indicated early mathematics needs are not being met in terms of diagnostic and screening tools and instructional strategies/programming. Consider providing resources and professional development in the area of mathematics for early childhood (e.g., UNI Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Center resources and Mathematics, The Creative Curriculum Approach).
4. While interviewees provided examples of services provided by the agency to address needs of specific subgroup populations (e.g., special education, G/T, and English Language Learners (ELL), limited comments were made regarding supports for the broader category of "at-risk" students. The agency is encourage to consider the following:
  - Work with LEAs to identify underserved populations
  - Work with LEAs to develop, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of their at-risk programs/services, as required by Chapter 12 of Iowa Administrative Code
  - Purposefully address the needs of at-risk students beyond work with counselors

## **Standard V – Multicultural, Gender Fair**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency and LEA staff identified a variety of ways in which the agency assists LEAs in developing cultural competence. For example:
  - The agency has implemented monthly "lunch and learns" covering topics related to cultural competence. The lunch and learns are recorded and made available for checkout.
  - Each of the agency's regional offices has a box with various activities and books related to cultural competence that PLLCs can provide to LEAs.
2. Agency and LEA staff interviewees reported multi-cultural/gender fair issues are addressed through implementation of PBIS. For example, data indicated disproportionality in one district in the area of discipline (i.e., more males than females were receiving discipline referrals). An agency team worked with the district to understand the issue and problem-solve how to address potentially discriminatory practices in this area.

3. LEA and agency interviewees described the effectiveness of the poverty simulations offered through the agency. Participants share a common experience and develop a common language about poverty issues. Interviewees stated the simulation and related materials resulted in important conversations at all levels of the system.
4. Interviewees reported the agency has an internal Cultural Competency Council and a Cultural Competency work group that carries out the goals of the Council. The Council includes employee and board member representation and meets monthly. While the Council focuses its efforts on ways to bring awareness about cultural competency to agency staff, it has also identified agency resources that can be used by LEAs.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. When asked how the agency works to ensure students are not discriminated against or bullied or harassed, some agency staff shared awareness of a variety of materials and resources. However, LEA staff shared limited knowledge of what ongoing assistance is available through the agency regarding these issues. An LEA administrator noted lesbian, gay, trans-gender, bi-sexual issues do exist in schools and districts, yet these issues are sometimes difficult to resolve in the absence of external support. Consider reviewing agency media resources and publishing a bibliography of resources relevant to this topic as well as investigating outside agencies (e.g., Iowa Safe schools, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG]) that could assist schools and districts with these issues.
2. While LEA interviewees referenced integrating multicultural, gender fair (MCGF) concepts into a variety of agency services, there was little reference to the integration of these concepts within content area professional development. The agency is encouraged to consider how to embed MCGF practices into content area professional development, including, but not limited to the areas of reading, mathematics, and science.

## **Standard VI – Media and Standard VII – School Technology**

### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency and LEA interviewees noted the wide variety of on-line databases which can be accessed through the agency. Examples included BookFLIX™, netTrekker, Atomic Learning<sup>SM</sup>, Discovery Education, and Clipart. Use of federated search makes locating content on these databases user friendly. Data are collected from LEAs regarding which databases the agency should provide.
2. Agency interviewees reported media and technology staff work with internal staff to integrate media and technology into professional development initiatives such as Math CAB, Curriculum Network, E2T2, MCGF, and Iowa Core Curriculum. In addition, LEA and agency interviewees reported the staff provides technical assistance and assists LEAs with technology planning, including use of emerging technologies, such as iPods, Web 2.0 tools, Kindles, and other resources. LEA interviewees also reported the agency provides strong support for district technology coordinators
3. Agency and LEA interviewees reported the agency does “a nice job” of informing people about materials and resources that are available. Information is found on the agency’s website, in its *World of Media* newsletter and through tours of the media center.

4. Media and School Technology services assist LEAs by providing a variety of supports. Examples of these supports provided by interviewees included the following:
- A social skills curriculum that can be previewed by LEAs to determine if it meets their needs.
  - An agency-developed book that had a curriculum for social emotional issues with reviews and quality ratings. Trends indicated the more highly rated resources were used more frequently after the publication of this book.
  - Availability of a broad range of assistive technology resources. This includes an opportunity for devices to be used in the home and/or classroom to determine effectiveness prior to being purchased by an LEA.
  - Availability of study group materials for checkout by agency and LEA staff members.
  - Table of Content service for journal issues, sent by email to teachers, which allows for checkout of articles of interest.
  - Support for PBIS, including book nooks and web-based learning opportunities (e.g., Moodle).
  - Use of webinars, Skype™, and chat programs for training to help reduce travel time
  - Expanded use of Web 2.0 tools (e.g., Etherpad, Ning, and wikis) in internal agency work.
  - Providing agency staff technology tools such as cell phone internet access, cameras, timers, and iPods to allow them to do their work more efficiently.
  - Instructional technology consultants assisted with an application for the iTouch which helped with students' Behavior Intervention Plans.

#### **Areas of Recommendation**

None identified at this time.

## **Standard VIII – Leadership**

#### **Noted Strengths**

1. Agency and LEA interviewees described several leadership opportunities available to LEA staff. These included, but are not limited to the following:
- Curriculum Networks
  - Superintendent meetings
  - Special Education University
  - G/T Network and G/T Academy
  - Technology directors
  - Counselor Academy
  - Support for the Iowa Association of School Boards' Lighthouse Project
  - Early Childhood Network
  - Principal Network (early childhood/elementary and middle school)
- Interviewees also described several leadership trainings provided for LEA and agency staff. These included Evaluator Approval Training, Balanced Leadership, eWalk, and Project Power-Up (designed to help administrators with ELL needs).
2. Agency and LEA interviewees reported agency staff members serve on a variety of LEA leadership teams and committees to support implementation of actions to meet LEA goals (e.g., SIAC, Iowa Core Curriculum, IDM, IEP, Building Assistance Teams, and Professional Development Councils).

3. Special Education interviewees reported the agency currently offers a class entitled “Early Childhood 101.” This class introduces agency administration and middle management to Early ACCESS and helps them understand how EA works.

**Areas of Recommendation**

None identified at this time.

**Accreditation Status: Heartland AEA**

Heartland Area Education Agency is recommended for **continued accreditation** pursuant to 281—IAC Chapter 72.