

CHAPTER 12
GENERAL ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

[Prior to 9/7/88, see Public Instruction Department[670] Ch 4]

PREAMBLE

The goal for the early childhood through twelfth grade educational system in Iowa is to improve the learning, achievement, and performance of all students so they become successful members of a community and workforce. It is expected that each school and school district shall continue to improve its educational system so that more students will increase their learning, achievement, and performance.

Accreditation focuses on an ongoing school improvement process for schools and school districts. However, general accreditation standards are the minimum requirements that must be met by an Iowa public school district to be accredited. A public school district that does not maintain accreditation shall be merged, by the state board of education, with one or more contiguous school districts as required by Iowa Code subsection 256.11(12). A nonpublic school must meet the general accreditation standards if it wishes to be designated as accredited for operation in Iowa.

General accreditation standards are intended to fulfill the state's responsibility for making available an appropriate educational program that has high expectations for all students in Iowa. The accreditation standards ensure that each child has access to an educational program that meets the needs and abilities of the child regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, marital status, geographic location, or socioeconomic background.

With local community input, school districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall incorporate accountability for student achievement into comprehensive school improvement plans designed to increase the learning, achievement, and performance of all students. As applicable, and to the extent possible, comprehensive school improvement plans shall consolidate federal and state program goal setting, planning, and reporting requirements. Provisions for multicultural and gender fair education, technology integration, global education, gifted and talented students, at-risk students, students with disabilities, and the professional development of all staff shall be incorporated, as applicable, into the comprehensive school improvement plan. See subrules 12.5(8) to 12.5(13), 12.7(1), and 12.8(1).

DIVISION I
GENERAL STANDARDS

281—12.1(256) General standards.

12.1(1) *Schools and school districts governed by general accreditation standards.* These standards govern the accreditation of all prekindergarten, if offered, or kindergarten through grade 12 school districts operated by public school corporations and the accreditation, if requested, of prekindergarten or kindergarten through grade 12 schools operated under nonpublic auspices. Each school district shall take affirmative steps to integrate students in attendance centers and courses. Schools and school districts shall collect and annually review district, attendance center, and course enrollment data on the basis of race, national origin, gender, and disability. Equal opportunity in programs shall be provided to all students regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, or creed. Nothing in this rule shall be construed as prohibiting any bona fide religious institution from imposing qualifications based upon religion when such qualifications are related to a bona fide religious purpose.

12.1(2) *School board.* Each school or school district shall be governed by an identifiable authority which shall exercise the functions necessary for the effective operation of the school and referred to in these rules as the "board."

12.1(3) *Application for accreditation.* The board of any school or school district that is not accredited on the effective date of these standards and which seeks accreditation shall file an application with the director, department of education, on or before the first day of January of the school year preceding the school year for which accreditation is sought.

12.1(4) Accredited schools and school districts. Each school or school district receiving accreditation under the provisions of these standards shall remain accredited except when by action of the state board of education it is removed from the list of accredited schools maintained by the department of education in accordance with Iowa Code subsections 256.11(11) and 256.11(12).

12.1(5) When nonaccredited. A school district shall be nonaccredited on the day after the date it is removed from the list of accredited schools by action of the state board of education. A nonpublic school shall be nonaccredited on the date established by the resolution of the state board, which shall be no later than the end of the school year in which the nonpublic school is declared to be nonaccredited.

12.1(6) Alternative provisions for accreditation. School districts may meet accreditation requirements through the provisions of Iowa Code sections 256.13, nonresident students; 273.7A, services to school districts; 279.20, superintendent—term; 280.15, joint employment and sharing; 282.7, attending in another corporation—payment; and 282.10, whole grade sharing. Nonpublic schools may meet accreditation requirements through the provisions of Iowa Code section 256.12.

12.1(7) Minimum school calendar and day of instruction. Each board shall adopt a school calendar that identifies specific days for student instruction, staff development and in-service time, and time for parent-teacher conferences. The length of the school calendar does not dictate the length of contract or days of employment for instructional and noninstructional staff. The school calendar may be operated anytime during the school year of July 1 to June 30 as defined by Iowa Code section 279.10. A minimum of 180 days of the school calendar, for school districts beginning no sooner than a day during the calendar week in which the first day of September falls, shall be used for student instruction. However, if the first day of September falls on a Sunday, school may begin any day during the calendar week preceding September 1. These 180 days shall meet the requirements of “day of school” in subrule 12.1(8), “minimum school day” in subrule 12.1(9), and “day of attendance” in subrule 12.1(10). (Exception: A school or school district may, by board policy, excuse graduating seniors up to five days of instruction after school or school district requirements for graduation have been met.) If additional days are added to the regular school calendar because of inclement weather, a graduating senior who has met the school district’s requirements for graduation may be excused from attendance during the extended school calendar. A school or school district may begin its school calendar earlier for other educational purposes involving instructional and noninstructional staff.

12.1(8) Day of school. A day of school is a day during which the school or school district is in session and students are under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff. School shall be considered in session during parent-teacher conferences as well as during activities such as field trips if students are engaged in programs or activities under the guidance and direction of the instructional professional staff. All grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students. An exception is if either the elementary or secondary grades are closed and provided that this time missed is made up at some other point during the school calendar so as to meet the minimum of 180 days of instruction for all grades 1 through 12. If a classroom or attendance center is closed for emergency health or safety reasons but the remainder of the school or school district is in operation, the day may be counted as a day of school.

12.1(9) Minimum school day. A school day shall consist of a minimum of 5½ hours of instructional time for all grades 1 through 12. The minimum hours shall be exclusive of the lunch period. Passing time between classes as well as time spent on parent-teacher conferences may be counted as part of the 5½-hour requirement. The school or school district may record a day of school with less than the minimum instructional hours if emergency health or safety factors require the late arrival or early dismissal of students on a specific day; or if the total hours of instructional time for all grades 1 through 12 in any five consecutive school days equal a minimum of 27½ hours, even though any one day of school is less than the minimum instructional hours because staff development is provided for the instructional professional staff or because parent-teacher conferences have been scheduled beyond the regular school day.

Furthermore, if the total hours of instructional time for the first four consecutive days equal at least 27½ hours because parent-teacher conferences are held beyond the regular school day, a school or school district may record zero hours of instructional time on the fifth consecutive school day as a minimum school day.

12.1(10) Day of attendance. A day of attendance shall be a day during which students were present and under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff. When staff development designated by the board occurs outside of the time required for a “minimum school day,” students shall be counted in attendance. (Note exceptions in subrules 12.1(8) and 12.1(9).)

12.1(11) Kindergarten. The number of instructional days within the school calendar and the length of the school day for kindergarten shall be defined by the board. This subrule applies to an accredited nonpublic school only if it offers kindergarten.

DIVISION II
DEFINITIONS

281—12.2(256) Definitions. For purposes of these rules, the following definitions shall apply:

“*Alternative options education programs*” means alternative programs or schools as identified in Iowa Code section 280.19A.

“*Alternative program*” means a class or environment established within the regular educational program and designed to accommodate specific student educational needs such as, but not limited to, work-related training; reading, mathematics or science skills; communication skills; social skills; physical skills; employability skills; study skills; or life skills.

“*Alternative school*” means an environment established apart from the regular educational program and that includes policies and rules, staff, and resources designed to accommodate student needs and to provide a comprehensive education consistent with the student learning goals and content standards established by the school district or by the school districts participating in a consortium. Students attend by choice.

“*Annual improvement goals*” means the desired one-year rate of improvement for students. Data from multiple measures may be used to determine the rate of improvement.

“*At-risk student*” means any identified student who needs additional support and who is not meeting or not expected to meet the established goals of the educational program (academic, personal/social, career/vocational). At-risk students, other than students with disabilities, include but are not limited to students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts.

“*Baseline data*” means information gathered at a selected point in time and used thereafter as a basis from which to monitor change.

“*Benchmarks*” means specific knowledge and skills anchored to content standards that a student needs to accomplish by a specific grade or grade span.

“*Board*” means the board of directors in charge of a public school district or the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school.

“*Comprehensive school improvement plan*” means a design that shall describe how the school or school district will increase student learning, achievement, and performance. This ongoing improvement design may address more than student learning, achievement, and performance.

“*Content standards*” means broad statements about what students are expected to know and be able to do.

“*Curriculum*” means a plan that outlines what students shall be taught. Curriculum refers to all the courses offered, or all the courses offered in a particular area of study.

“*Department*” means the department of education.

“*Districtwide*” means all attendance centers within a school district or accredited nonpublic school.

“*Districtwide assessments*” means large-scale achievement or performance measures. At least one districtwide assessment shall allow for the following: the comparison of the same group of students over time as they progress through the grades or the cross-sectional comparison of students at the same grades over multiple years.

“Districtwide progress” means the quantifiable change in school or school district student achievement and performance.

“Dropout” means a school-age student who is served by a public school district and enrolled in any of grades seven through twelve and who does not attend school or withdraws from school for a reason other than death or transfer to another approved school or school district or has been expelled with no option to return.

“Educational program.” The educational program adopted by the board is the entire offering of the school, including out-of-class activities and the sequence of curriculum areas and activities. The educational program shall provide articulated, developmental learning experiences from the date of student entrance until high school graduation.

“Enrolled student” means a person that has officially registered with the school or school district and is taking part in the educational program.

“Incorporate” means integrating career education, multicultural and gender fair education, technology education, global education, higher-order thinking skills, learning skills, and communication skills into the total educational program.

“Indicators” provide information about the general status, quality, or performance of an educational system.

“Library program” means an articulated sequential kindergarten through grade 12 library or media program that enhances student achievement and is integral to the school district’s curricula and instructional program. The library program is planned and implemented by a qualified teacher librarian working collaboratively with the district’s administration and instructional staff. The library program services provided to students and staff shall include the following:

1. Support of the overall school curricula;
2. Collaborative planning and teaching;
3. Promotion of reading and literacy;
4. Information literacy instruction;
5. Access to a diverse and appropriate school library collection; and
6. Learning enhancement through technologies.

“Long-range goals” means desired targets to be reached over an extended period of time.

“Multiple assessment measures,” for reporting to the local community or the state, means more than one valid and reliable instrument that quantifies districtwide student learning, including specific grade-level data.

“Performance levels.” The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires that at least three levels of performance be established to assist in determining which students have or have not achieved a satisfactory or proficient level of performance. At least two of those three levels shall describe what all students ought to know or be able to do if their achievement or performance is deemed proficient or advanced. The third level shall describe students who are not yet performing at the proficient level. A school or school district may establish more than three performance levels that include all students for districtwide or other assessments.

“Potential dropouts” means resident pupils who are enrolled in a public or nonpublic school who demonstrate poor school adjustment as indicated by two or more of the following:

1. High rate of absenteeism, truancy, or frequent tardiness.
2. Limited or no extracurricular participation or lack of identification with school including, but not limited to, expressed feelings of not belonging.
3. Poor grades including, but not limited to, failing in one or more school subjects or grade levels.
4. Low achievement scores in reading or mathematics which reflect achievement at two years or more below grade level.

“Proficient,” as it relates to content standards, characterizes student performance at a level that is acceptable by the school or school district.

“*Returning dropouts*” means resident pupils who have been enrolled in a public or nonpublic school in any of grades seven through twelve who withdrew from school for a reason other than transfer to another school or school district and who subsequently enrolled in a public school in the district.

“*School*” means an accredited nonpublic school.

“*School district*” means a public school district.

“*School improvement advisory committee*” means a committee, as defined in Iowa Code section 280.12, that is appointed by the board. Committee membership shall include students, parents, teachers, administrators, and representatives from the local community which may include business, industry, labor, community agencies, higher education, or other community constituents. To the extent possible, committee membership shall have balanced representation of the following: race, gender, national origin, and disability. The school improvement advisory committee as defined by Iowa Code section 280.12 and the board are also part of, but not inclusive of, the local community.

“*Student learning goals*” means general statements of expectations for all graduates.

“*Students with disabilities*” means students who have individualized education programs regardless of the disability.

“*Subgroups*” means a subset of the student population that has a common characteristic. Subgroups include, but are not limited to, gender, race, students with disabilities, and socioeconomic status.

“*Successful employment in Iowa*” may be determined by, but is not limited to, reviewing student achievement and performance based on locally identified indicators such as earnings, educational attainment, reduced unemployment, and the attainment of employability skills.

DIVISION III
ADMINISTRATION

281—12.3(256) Administration. The following standards shall apply to the administration of accredited schools and school districts.

12.3(1) Board records. Each board shall adopt by written policy a system for maintaining accurate records. The system shall provide for recording and maintaining the minutes of all board meetings, coding all receipts and expenditures, and recording and filing all reports required by the Iowa Code or requested by the director of the department of education. Financial records of school districts shall be maintained in a manner as to be easily audited according to accepted accounting procedures.

12.3(2) Policy manual. The board shall develop and maintain a policy manual which provides a codification of its policies, including the adoption date, the review date, and any revision date for each policy. Policies shall be reviewed at least every five years to ensure relevance to current practices and compliance with the Iowa Code, administrative rules and decisions, and court decisions.

12.3(3) Personnel evaluation. Each board shall adopt evaluation criteria and procedures for all contracted staff. The evaluation processes shall conform to Iowa Code sections 272.33, 279.14, and 279.23A.

12.3(4) Student records. Each board shall require its administrative staff to establish and maintain a system of student records. This system shall include for each student a permanent office record and a cumulative record.

The permanent office record shall serve as a historical record of official information concerning the student’s education. The permanent office record shall be recorded and maintained under the student’s legal name. At a minimum, the permanent office record should contain evidence of attendance and educational progress, serve as an official transcript, contain other data for use in planning to meet student needs, and provide data for official school and school district reports. This record is to be permanently maintained and stored in a fire-resistant safe or vault or can be maintained and stored electronically with a secure backup file.