

**256.11 Educational standards.**

The state board shall adopt rules under [chapter 17A](#) and a procedure for accrediting all public and nonpublic schools in Iowa offering instruction at any or all levels from the prekindergarten level through grade twelve. The rules of the state board shall require that a multicultural, gender-fair approach is used by schools and school districts. The educational program shall be taught from a multicultural, gender-fair approach. Global perspectives shall be incorporated into all levels of the educational program. The rules adopted by the state board pursuant to [section 256.17, Code Supplement 1987](#), to establish new standards shall satisfy the requirements of [this section](#) to adopt rules to implement the educational program contained in [this section](#). The educational program shall be as follows:

1. *a.* If a school offers a prekindergarten program, the program shall be designed to help children to work and play with others, to express themselves, to learn to use and manage their bodies, and to extend their interests and understanding of the world about them. The prekindergarten program shall relate the role of the family to the child's developing sense of self and perception of others. Planning and carrying out prekindergarten activities designed to encourage cooperative efforts between home and school shall focus on community resources. Except as otherwise provided in [this subsection](#), a prekindergarten teacher shall hold a license certifying that the holder is qualified to teach in prekindergarten. A nonpublic school which offers only a prekindergarten may, but is not required to, seek and obtain accreditation.

*b.* If the board of directors of a school district contracts for the operation of a prekindergarten program, the program shall be under the oversight of an appropriately licensed teacher. If the program contracted with was in existence on July 1, 1989, oversight of the program shall be provided by the district. If the program contracted with was not in existence on July 1, 1989, the director of the program shall be a licensed teacher and the director shall provide program oversight. Any director of a program contracted with by a school district under [this section](#) who is not a licensed teacher is required to register with the department of education.

*c.* For the purposes of [this subsection](#), "*prekindergarten program*" includes but is not limited to a school district's implementation of the preschool program established pursuant to [chapter 256C](#).

2. The kindergarten program shall include experiences designed to develop healthy emotional and social habits and growth in the language arts and communication skills, as well as a capacity for the completion of individual tasks, and protect and increase physical well-being with attention given to experiences relating to the development of life skills and human growth and development. A kindergarten teacher shall be licensed to teach in kindergarten. An accredited nonpublic school must meet the requirements of [this subsection](#) only if the nonpublic school offers a kindergarten program.

3. The following areas shall be taught in grades one through six: English-language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, health, age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development, physical education, traffic safety, music, and visual art. The health curriculum shall include the characteristics of communicable diseases including acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The state board as part of accreditation standards shall adopt curriculum definitions for implementing the elementary program.

4. The following shall be taught in grades seven and eight: English-language arts; social studies; mathematics; science; health; age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development; career exploration and development; physical education; music; and visual art. Career exploration and development shall be designed so that students are appropriately prepared to create an individual career and academic plan pursuant to [section 279.61](#), incorporate foundational career and technical education concepts aligned with the six career and technical education service areas as defined in [subsection 5](#), paragraph "*h*", and incorporate relevant twenty-first century skills. The health curriculum shall include age-appropriate and research-based information regarding the characteristics of sexually transmitted diseases, including HPV and the availability of a vaccine to prevent HPV, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The state board as part of accreditation standards shall adopt curriculum definitions for implementing the program in grades seven and

eight. However, [this subsection](#) shall not apply to the teaching of career exploration and development in nonpublic schools. For purposes of [this section](#), “age-appropriate”, “HPV”, and “research-based” mean the same as defined in [section 279.50](#).

5. In grades nine through twelve, a unit of credit consists of a course or equivalent related components or partial units taught throughout the academic year. The minimum program to be offered and taught for grades nine through twelve is:

a. Five units of science including physics and chemistry; the units of physics and chemistry may be taught in alternate years.

b. Five units of the social studies including instruction in voting statutes and procedures, voter registration requirements, the use of paper ballots and voting systems in the election process, and the method of acquiring and casting an absentee ballot. All students shall complete a minimum of one-half unit of United States government and one unit of United States history. The one-half unit of United States government shall include the voting procedure as described in this lettered paragraph and [section 280.9A](#). The government instruction shall also include a study of the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution and an assessment of a student’s knowledge of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

c. Six units of English-language arts.

d. Four units of a sequential program in mathematics.

e. Two additional units of mathematics.

f. Four sequential units of one foreign language other than American sign language. Provision of instruction in American sign language shall be in addition to and not in lieu of provision of instruction in other foreign languages. The department may waive the third and fourth years of the foreign language requirement on an annual basis upon the request of the board of directors of a school district or the authorities in charge of a nonpublic school if the board or authorities are able to prove that a licensed teacher was employed and assigned a schedule that would have allowed students to enroll in a foreign language class, the foreign language class was properly scheduled, students were aware that a foreign language class was scheduled, and no students enrolled in the class.

g. (1) All students physically able shall be required to participate in physical education activities during each semester they are enrolled in school except as otherwise provided in this paragraph. A minimum of one-eighth unit each semester is required. A twelfth grade student who meets the requirements of this paragraph may be excused from the physical education requirement by the principal of the school in which the student is enrolled if the parent or guardian of the student requests in writing that the student be excused from the physical education requirement. A student who wishes to be excused from the physical education requirement must be seeking to be excused in order to enroll in academic courses not otherwise available to the student, or be enrolled or participating in one of the following:

(a) A work-based learning program or other educational program authorized by the school which requires the student to leave the school premises for specified periods of time during the school day.

(b) An organized and supervised athletic program which requires at least as much participation per week as one-eighth unit of physical education.

(2) Students in grades nine through eleven may be excused from the physical education requirement in order to enroll in academic courses not otherwise available to the student if the board of directors of the school district in which the school is located, or the authorities in charge of the school, if the school is a nonpublic school, determine that students from the school may be permitted to be excused from the physical education requirement. A student may be excused by the principal of the school in which the student is enrolled, in consultation with the student’s counselor, for up to one semester, trimester, or the equivalent of a semester or trimester, per year if the parent or guardian of the student requests in writing that the student be excused from the physical education requirement. The student seeking to be excused from the physical education requirement must, at some time during the period for which the excuse is sought, be a participant in an organized and supervised athletic program which requires at least as much time of participation per week as one-eighth unit of physical education.

(3) The principal of the school shall inform the superintendent of the school district or nonpublic school that the student has been excused. Physical education activities shall emphasize leisure time activities which will benefit the student outside the school environment and after graduation from high school.

*h.* (1) A minimum of three sequential units in at least four of the following six career and technical education service areas:

- (a) Agriculture, food, and natural resources.
- (b) Arts, communications, and information systems.
- (c) Applied sciences, technology, engineering, and manufacturing, including transportation, distribution, logistics, architecture, and construction.
- (d) Health sciences.
- (e) Human services, including law, public safety, corrections, security, government, public administration, and education and training.
- (f) Business, finance, marketing, and management.

(2) Instructional programs provided under subparagraph (1) shall comply with the provisions of [chapter 258](#) relating to career and technical education, and shall be articulated with postsecondary programs of study and include field, laboratory, or on-the-job training. Each sequential unit shall contain a portion of a career and technical education program approved by the department. Standards for instructional programs shall include but not be limited to new and emerging technologies; job-seeking, job-adaptability, and other employment, self-employment and entrepreneurial skills that reflect current industry standards and labor-market needs; and reinforcement of basic academic skills.

(3) The department of education shall permit school districts, in meeting the requirements of [this section](#), to use career and technical education core courses in more than one career and technical education service area and to use multi-occupational courses to complete a sequence in more than one career and technical education service area.

(4) This paragraph “*h*” does not apply to the teaching of career and technical education in nonpublic schools.

*i.* Three units in the fine arts which shall include at least two of the following: dance, music, theater, and visual art.

*j.* (1) One unit of health education which shall include personal health; food and nutrition; environmental health; safety and survival skills; consumer health; family life; age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development; substance abuse and nonuse; emotional and social health; health resources; and prevention and control of disease, including age-appropriate and research-based information regarding sexually transmitted diseases, including HPV and the availability of a vaccine to prevent HPV, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

(2) The state board as part of accreditation standards shall adopt curriculum standards for implementing the program in grades nine through twelve.

6. *a.* A pupil is not required to enroll in either physical education or health courses, or meet the requirements of paragraph “*b*” or “*c*”, if the pupil’s parent or guardian files a written statement with the school principal that the course or activity conflicts with the pupil’s religious belief.

*b.* (1) All physically able students in kindergarten through grade five shall be required to engage in a physical activity for a minimum of thirty minutes per school day.

(2) All physically able students in grades six through twelve shall be required to engage in a physical activity for a minimum of one hundred twenty minutes per week. A student participating in an organized and supervised athletic program or non-school-sponsored extracurricular activity which requires the student to participate in physical activity for a minimum of one hundred twenty minutes per week is exempt from the requirements of this subparagraph.

(3) The department shall collaborate with stakeholders on the development of daily physical activity requirements and the development of models that describe ways in which school districts and schools may incorporate the physical activity requirement of this paragraph into the educational program. A school district or accredited nonpublic school

shall not reduce instructional time for academic courses in order to meet the requirements of this paragraph.

c. Every student by the end of grade twelve shall complete a certification course for cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The administrator of a school may waive this requirement if the student is not physically able to successfully complete the training. A student is exempt from the requirement of this paragraph if the student presents satisfactory evidence to the school district or accredited nonpublic school that the student possesses cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification.

7. Programs that meet the needs of each of the following:

- a. Pupils requiring special education.
- b. Gifted and talented pupils.
- c. At-risk students.

8. Upon request of the board of directors of a public school district or the authorities in charge of a nonpublic school, the director may, for a number of years to be specified by the director, grant the district board or the authorities in charge of the nonpublic school exemption from one or more of the requirements of the educational program specified in [subsection 5](#). The exemption may be renewed. Exemptions shall be granted only if the director deems that the request made is an essential part of a planned innovative curriculum project which the director determines will adequately meet the educational needs and interests of the pupils and be broadly consistent with the intent of the educational program as defined in [subsection 5](#). The request for exemption shall include all of the following:

- a. Rationale of the project to include supportive research evidence.
- b. Objectives of the project.
- c. Provisions for administration and conduct of the project, including the use of personnel, facilities, time, techniques, and activities.
- d. Plans for evaluation of the project by testing and observational measures of pupil progress in reaching the objectives.
- e. Plans for revisions of the project based on evaluation measures.
- f. Plans for periodic reports to the department.
- g. The estimated cost of the project.

9. Beginning July 1, 2006, each school district shall have a qualified teacher librarian who shall be licensed by the board of educational examiners under [chapter 272](#). The state board shall establish in rule a definition of and standards for an articulated sequential kindergarten through grade twelve media program. A school district that entered into a contract with an individual for employment as a media specialist or librarian prior to June 1, 2006, shall be considered to be in compliance with [this subsection](#) until June 30, 2011, if the individual is making annual progress toward meeting the requirements for a teacher librarian endorsement issued by the board of educational examiners under [chapter 272](#). A school district that entered into a contract with an individual for employment as a media specialist or librarian who holds at least a master's degree in library and information studies shall be considered to be in compliance with [this subsection](#) until the individual leaves the employ of the school district.

9A. Beginning July 1, 2007, each school district shall have a qualified guidance counselor who shall be licensed by the board of educational examiners under [chapter 272](#). Each school district shall work toward the goal of having one qualified guidance counselor for every three hundred fifty students enrolled in the school district. The state board shall establish in rule a definition of and standards for an articulated sequential kindergarten through grade twelve guidance and counseling program.

9B. Beginning July 1, 2007, each school district shall have a school nurse to provide health services to its students. Each school district shall work toward the goal of having one school nurse for every seven hundred fifty students enrolled in the school district. For purposes of [this subsection](#), "school nurse" means a person who holds an endorsement or a statement of professional recognition for school nurses issued by the board of educational examiners under [chapter 272](#).

10. The state board shall establish an accreditation process for school districts and nonpublic schools seeking accreditation pursuant to [this subsection](#) and [subsections 11 and](#)

12. By July 1, 1989, all school districts shall meet standards for accreditation. For the school year commencing July 1, 1989, and school years thereafter, the department of education shall use a two-phase process for the continued accreditation of schools and school districts.

a. (1) Phase I shall consist of annual monitoring by the department of education of all accredited schools and school districts for compliance with accreditation standards adopted by the state board of education as provided in [this section](#). The phase I monitoring requires that accredited schools and school districts annually complete accreditation compliance forms adopted by the state board and file them with the department of education. Phase I monitoring requires a comprehensive desk audit of all accredited schools and school districts including review of accreditation compliance forms, accreditation visit reports, methods of administration reports, and reports submitted in compliance with [section 256.7](#), [subsection 21](#), paragraph “a”, and [section 280.12](#).

(2) The department shall conduct site visits to schools and school districts to address accreditation issues identified in the desk audit. Such a visit may be conducted by an individual departmental consultant or may be a comprehensive site visit by a team of departmental consultants and other educational professionals. The purpose of a comprehensive site visit is to determine that a district is in compliance with minimum standards and to provide a general assessment of educational practices in a school or school district and make recommendations with regard to the visit findings for the purposes of improving educational practices above the level of minimum compliance. The department shall establish a long-term schedule of site visits that includes visits of all accredited schools and school districts as needed.

b. (1) Phase II requires the use of an accreditation committee, appointed by the director of the department of education, to conduct an on-site visit to an accredited school or school district if any of the following conditions exist:

(a) When either the annual monitoring or the biennial on-site visit of phase I indicates that a school or school district is deficient and fails to be in compliance with accreditation standards.

(b) In response to a petition filed with the director requesting such a committee visitation that is signed by eligible electors residing in the school district equal in number to at least twenty percent of the registered voters of the school district.

(c) In response to a petition filed with the director requesting such a committee visitation that is signed by twenty percent or more of the parents or guardians who have children enrolled in the school or school district.

(d) At the direction of the state board of education.

(e) The school budget review committee submits to the department a recommendation for a fiscal review pursuant to [section 257.31](#), [subsection 18](#).

(2) The number and composition of the membership of an accreditation committee shall be determined by the director and may vary due to the specific nature or reason for the visit. In all situations, however, the chairperson and a majority of the committee membership shall be from the instructional and administrative program specialty staff of the department of education. Other members may include instructional and administrative staff from school districts, area education agencies, institutions of higher education, local board members and the general public. An accreditation committee visit to a nonpublic school requires membership on the committee from nonpublic school instructional or administrative staff or board members. A member of a committee shall not have a direct interest in the nonpublic school or school district being visited.

(3) Rules adopted by the state board may include provisions for coordination of the accreditation process under [this section](#) with activities of accreditation associations.

(4) Prior to a visit to a school district or nonpublic school, members of the accreditation committee shall have access to all annual accreditation report information filed with the department by that nonpublic school or school district.

(5) After visiting the school district or nonpublic school, the accreditation committee shall determine whether the accreditation standards have been met and shall make a report to the director, together with a recommendation whether the school district or nonpublic school shall remain accredited. If the recommendation is that a school district or nonpublic

school not remain accredited, the accreditation committee shall provide the school district or nonpublic school with a report that includes a list of all of the deficiencies, a plan prescribing the actions that must be taken to correct the deficiencies, and a deadline date for completion of the prescribed actions. The accreditation committee shall advise the school district or nonpublic school of available resources and technical assistance to improve areas of weakness. The school district or nonpublic school shall be provided with the opportunity to respond to the accreditation committee's report. The director shall review the accreditation committee's report and the response of the school district or nonpublic school and shall provide a report to the state board along with copies of the accreditation committee's report, the response to the accreditation committee's report, and other pertinent information. At the request of the school district or nonpublic school, the school district or nonpublic school may appear before the state board and address the state board directly regarding any part of the plan specified in the report. The state board may modify the plan. During the period of time specified in the plan for its implementation by a school district or nonpublic school, the school district or school shall remain accredited.

11. The accreditation committee shall revisit the school district or nonpublic school and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the standards have been corrected.

a. The accreditation team shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board. The committee recommendation shall specify whether the school district or nonpublic school shall remain accredited. For a school district, the committee report and recommendation shall also specify under what conditions the district may remain accredited. The conditions may include but are not limited to providing temporary oversight authority, operational authority, or both oversight and operational authority to the director and the state board for some or all aspects of the school district in order to bring the school district into compliance with minimum standards.

b. The state board shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies have been corrected.

c. If the deficiencies have not been corrected, and the conditional accreditation alternatives contained in the report are not mutually acceptable to the state board and the local board, the state board shall deaccredit the school district and merge the territory of the school district with one or more contiguous school districts at the end of the school year. The state board may place a district under receivership for the remainder of the school year. The receivership shall be under the direct supervision and authority of the area education agency in which the district is located. The decision of whether to deaccredit the school district or to place the district under receivership shall be based upon a determination by the state board of the best interests of the students, parents, residents of the community, teachers, administrators, and school district board members and upon the recommendations of the accreditation committee and the director.

d. In the case of a nonpublic school, if the deficiencies have not been corrected, the state board may deaccredit the nonpublic school. The deaccreditation shall take effect 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 deaccredited.

12. If the state board deaccredits a school district and merges the territory of the school district with one or more contiguous school districts, the deaccredited school district ceases to exist as a school corporation on the effective date set by the state board for deaccreditation. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the contiguous school districts receiving territory of the deaccredited school district are not considered successor school corporations of the deaccredited school district.

a. Division of assets and liabilities of the deaccredited school district shall be as provided in this paragraph "a" and in [sections 275.29 through 275.31](#).

(1) If one or more of the contiguous school districts receiving assets and liabilities of the deaccredited school district utilizes the equalization levy, only that territory in the school district imposing the equalization levy that comprises territory of the deaccredited school district shall be taxed.

(2) Income surtax revenue and revenues generated by property taxes shall be distributed

proportionately based on taxable value of the territory received by one or more school districts contiguous to the deaccredited school district.

(3) Revenues that are based on student enrollment shall be distributed based on percentages of students who were enrolled in the deaccredited school district in the school year immediately prior to deaccreditation and who now reside in territory received by one or more school districts contiguous to the deaccredited school district.

(4) If the deaccredited school district has a negative fund balance in its general fund at the time it is deaccredited by the state board, the director may order that the positive balance from one or more other funds of the deaccredited school district be transferred to the deaccredited school district's general fund.

b. Prior to the effective date set by the state board for deaccreditation, the school district shall remain responsible for, and may retain such authority as is necessary to complete, all of the following:

(1) Execution of one or more quitclaim deeds, in fulfillment of the merger of territory received by one or more contiguous school districts from the deaccredited school district.

(2) Preparation of and payment for a final audit of all the district's financial accounts.

(3) Preparation and certification of a final certified annual report to the department.

c. The provisions of [section 275.57](#) apply when deaccreditation of a school district and merger of the territory of such school district with a contiguous school district that is currently divided into director districts leads to the formation of new director districts.

13. Notwithstanding [subsections 1 through 12](#) and as an exception to their requirements, a private high school or private combined junior-senior high school operated for the express purpose of teaching a program designed to qualify its graduates for matriculation at accredited four-year or equivalent liberal arts, scientific, or technological colleges or universities shall be placed on a special accredited list of college preparatory schools, which list shall signify accreditation of the school for that express purpose only, if:

a. The school complies with minimum standards established by the Code other than [this section](#), and rules adopted under the Code, applicable to:

(1) Courses comprising the limited program.

(2) Health requirements for personnel.

(3) Plant facilities.

(4) Other environmental factors affecting the programs.

b. At least eighty percent of those graduating from the school within the four most recent calendar years, other than those graduating who are aliens, graduates entering military or alternative civilian service, or graduates deceased or incapacitated before college acceptance, have been accepted by accredited four-year or equivalent liberal arts, scientific, or technological colleges or universities.

c. A school claiming to be a private college preparatory school which fails to comply with the requirement of paragraph "b" of [this subsection](#) shall be placed on the special accredited list of college preparatory schools probationally if the school complies with the requirements of paragraph "a" of [this subsection](#), but a probational accreditation shall not continue for more than four successive years.

14. Notwithstanding [subsections 1 through 13](#) and as an exception to their requirements, a nonpublic grade school which is reopening is accredited even if it does not have a complete grade one through grade six program. However, the nonpublic grade school must comply with other minimum standards established by law and administrative rules adopted pursuant to the law and the nonpublic grade school must show progress toward reaching a grade one through grade six program.

15. The board of directors of a school district or the authorities in charge of a nonpublic school may award credit toward graduation to a student if the student successfully completes basic training for service as a member of the Iowa army national guard, the Iowa air national guard, the active military forces of the United States, the army national guard of the United States, or the air national guard of the United States.

16. a. Notwithstanding [subsections 1 through 12](#), a nonpublic school may be accredited by an approved independent accrediting agency instead of by the state board as provided in [this subsection](#). The state board shall maintain a list of approved independent accrediting

agencies comprised of at least six regional or national nonprofit, nongovernmental agencies recognized as reliable authorities concerning the quality of education offered by a school and shall publish the list of independent accrediting agencies on the department’s internet site. The list shall include accrediting agencies that, as of January 1, 2013, accredited a nonpublic school in this state that was concurrently accredited under [this section](#); and any agency that has a formalized partnership agreement with another agency on the list and has member schools in this state as of January 1, 2013.

b. A nonpublic school that participates in the accreditation process offered by an independent accrediting agency on the approved list published pursuant to paragraph “a” shall be deemed to meet the education standards of [this section](#). However, such a school shall comply with statutory health and safety requirements for school facilities.

c. If the state board takes preliminary action to remove an agency from the approved list published on the department’s internet site pursuant to paragraph “a”, the department shall, at least one year prior to removing the agency from the approved list, notify the nonpublic schools participating in the accreditation process offered by the agency of the state board’s intent to remove the accrediting agency from its approved list of independent accrediting agencies. The notice shall also be posted on the department’s internet site and shall contain the proposed date of removal. The nonpublic school shall attain accreditation under [this subsection](#) or [subsections 1 through 12](#) not later than one year following the date on which the state board removes the agency from its list of independent accrediting agencies.

86 Acts, ch 1245, §1411; 87 Acts, ch 224, §26; 87 Acts, ch 233, §451; 88 Acts, ch 1018, §1, 2; 88 Acts, ch 1262, §1, 2; 89 Acts, ch 210, §4, 5; 89 Acts, ch 265, §23 – 26; 89 Acts, ch 278, §1, 2; 89 Acts, ch 319, §39, 40; 90 Acts, ch 1272, §32, 39, 40; 91 Acts, ch 104, §1; 91 Acts, ch 193, §1; 92 Acts, ch 1088, §1; 92 Acts, ch 1127, §1, 2; 92 Acts, ch 1159, §2; 92 Acts, ch 1163, §58; 93 Acts, ch 127, §1, 2; 94 Acts, ch 1091, §13; 94 Acts, ch 1152, §1; 2001 Acts, ch 56, §11; 2001 Acts, ch 159, §1 – 3; 2002 Acts, ch 1140, §7; 2004 Acts, ch 1027, §1; 2005 Acts, ch 3, §55; 2006 Acts, ch 1182, §2; 2007 Acts, ch 42, §1; 2007 Acts, ch 98, §2, 3; 2007 Acts, ch 108, §4; 2007 Acts, ch 148, §7; 2008 Acts, ch 1031, §42; 2008 Acts, ch 1187, §142, 145; 2009 Acts, ch 50, §1, 2; 2009 Acts, ch 57, §74; 2010 Acts, ch 1061, §180; 2010 Acts, ch 1064, §1, 2; 2013 Acts, ch 121, §89; 2016 Acts, ch 1108, §26 – 28; 2016 Acts, ch 1138, §15, 24; 2017 Acts, ch 29, §58

Referred to in §161A.7, §237.1, §237A.1, §256.7, §256.9, §256.10A, §256.11B, §256.42, §257.11, §257.31, §258.3A, §258.4, §258.6, §258.10, §258.14, §258.15, §261E.9, §273.2, §279.50, §279.61, §280.2, §280.3, §282.18, §282.34, §285.16, §299.2, §299.24, §422.11S, §422.12, §455E.8, §483A.27, §714.19

Career and technical agriculture education; §280.20  
 Subsection 5, paragraph h, subparagraph (3) amended