

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT[281]

Adopted and Filed

**Rule making related to high school programs, school accreditation,
and flexible student and school support program**

The State Board of Education hereby amends Chapter 12, “General Accreditation Standards,” Iowa Administrative Code.

Legal Authority for Rule Making

This rule making is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 256.7(5).

State or Federal Law Implemented

This rule making implements, in whole or in part, 2021 Iowa Acts, House Files 793, 847, and 868, and 2021 Iowa Acts, Senate File 517.

Purpose and Summary

2021 Iowa Acts, Senate File 517 and House File 793, altered the physical education requirements and other academic requirements for students participating in the Legislative Page program and the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, respectively. Division I of House File 847 comprehensively revised the process by which schools seek flexibility from general accreditation standards. Division III of House File 868 comprehensively revised and modernized the Department of Education’s accountability framework for accreditation, accountability, and improvement for school districts and accredited nonpublic schools. These amendments implement the above changes.

Public Comment and Changes to Rule Making

Notice of Intended Action for this rule making was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on February 9, 2022, as **ARC 6182C**. A public hearing was held on March 1, 2022, at 10 a.m. at the Grimes State Office Building, with an option for videoconference participation. Two people attended but did not provide comment. No public comments were received. No changes from the Notice have been made.

Adoption of Rule Making

This rule making was adopted by the State Board on March 24, 2022.

Fiscal Impact

This rule making has no fiscal impact to the State of Iowa.

Jobs Impact

After analysis and review of this rule making, no impact on jobs has been found.

Waivers

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rule making would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the State Board for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to Chapter 281—Chapter 4.

Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rule making by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or

group, review this rule making at its [regular monthly meeting](#) or at a special meeting. The Committee's meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

Effective Date

This rule making will become effective on May 25, 2022.

The following rule-making actions are adopted:

ITEM 1. Amend subrule 12.5(14) as follows:

12.5(14) Unit. A unit is a course which meets one of the following criteria: it is taught for at least 200 minutes per week for 36 weeks; it is taught for the equivalent of 120 hours of instruction; it requires the demonstration of proficiency of formal competencies associated with the course according to the State Guidelines for Competency-Based Education or its successor organization; or it is an equated requirement as a part of ~~an innovative~~ a flexible student and school support program filed as prescribed in rule 281—12.9(256). A fractional unit shall be calculated in a manner consistent with this subrule. Unless the method of instruction is competency-based, multiple-section courses taught at the same time in a single classroom situation by one teacher do not meet this unit definition for the assignment of a unit of credit. However, the third and fourth years of a world language may be taught at the same time by one teacher in a single classroom situation, each yielding a unit of credit.

ITEM 2. Adopt the following new subrule 12.5(22):

12.5(22) Additional provisions related to the high school program.

a. *Legislative page program.* The board of directors of a school district and the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school shall each establish a policy to award credit toward graduation to a student if the student participates in the legislative page program at the state capitol for a regular session of the general assembly. The student shall be excused from the physical education requirements of paragraph 12.5(5) "f," and is exempt from the physical activity requirements of subrule 12.5(19), while participating in the legislative page program. The student must complete the graduation requirements of subrule 12.3(5) and the introductory paragraph of subrule 12.5(5), but participation in the legislative page program for a complete regular session of the general assembly shall count as one-half unit of social studies credit required for purposes of the introductory paragraph of subrule 12.5(5).

b. *Junior reserve officers' training corps.* A student who is enrolled in a junior reserve officers' training corps shall not be required to participate in physical education activities under paragraph 12.5(5) "f," or to meet the physical activity requirements of subrule 12.5(19), but shall receive one-eighth unit of physical education credit for each semester, or the equivalent, of junior reserve officers' training corps the student completes.

ITEM 3. Amend subrule 12.8(2) as follows:

12.8(2) Submission of a comprehensive school improvement plan. A school or school district shall submit to the department and respective area education agency a multiyear comprehensive school improvement plan on or before September 15, 2000. Beginning July 1, 2001, a school or school district shall submit a revised five-year comprehensive school improvement plan by September 15 of the school year following the comprehensive site visit specified in Iowa Code section 256.11 which incorporates, when appropriate, areas of improvement noted ~~by the school improvement visitation team as described in~~ pursuant to subrule 12.8(4). A school or school district may, at any time, file a revised comprehensive school improvement plan with the department and respective area education agency.

ITEM 4. Rescind subrule 12.8(4) and adopt the following new subrule in lieu thereof:

12.8(4) Accreditation, monitoring, and enforcement. The state board shall establish, and the department shall use, for the school year commencing July 1, 2021, and each succeeding school year, an accreditation, monitoring, and enforcement process for school districts and nonpublic schools seeking accreditation pursuant to this chapter. The process established shall include all of the following requirements.

a. Phase I monitoring.

(1) Phase I monitoring shall consist of annual monitoring by the department of all accredited schools and school districts for compliance with state and federal school laws, regulations, and rules adopted by the state board under Iowa Code chapter 17A, including but not limited to the following:

1. Accreditation standards adopted by the state board as provided in this chapter.
2. Fiscal compliance.
3. Federal education laws including but not limited to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq., as amended.
4. The federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Iowa Code chapter 216.
5. All other requirements of this chapter applicable to accredited schools and school districts.

(2) Phase I monitoring may include but shall not be limited to the following:

1. One or more desk audits requiring submission of information to the department in a manner and on forms prescribed by the department.
2. One or more remote or on-site visits to schools or school districts to address accreditation issues identified in a 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 subject-matter professionals.
3. A review of district finances by department staff or a neutral third party.
4. A review of local school board policies and procedures by department staff or a neutral third party.

(3) The department shall provide a public report annually of findings of noncompliance and required corrective actions for each accredited school and school district. The purpose of the phase I process is to bring schools and school districts into minimum compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and rules, and no citation or corrective action may be designed to require more than minimum compliance.

(4) The department shall provide a written report annually to the state board of any monitoring review resulting in multiple or substantial findings of noncompliance or noncompliance findings that remain uncorrected for more than 30 days past the deadline set by the department for correction.

(5) The department shall eliminate duplicative reporting on the part of schools and school districts for phase I monitoring, and is prohibited from collecting information not specifically permitted by federal or state law, regulation, or rule.

(6) Enforcement actions under phase I monitoring are limited to actions permitted pursuant to subparagraphs 12.8(4)“c”(2) and 12.8(4)“c”(3). Violations of federal legal requirements shall follow the procedures and limitations of the governing federal statute and regulations.

b. Phase II monitoring.

(1) Phase II monitoring shall take place when any of the following conditions are present:

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

2. In response to a petition filed with the director requesting such an accreditation committee visitation that is signed by eligible electors residing in the school district equal in number to at least 20 percent of the registered voters of the school district.

3. In response to a petition filed with the director requesting such an accreditation committee visitation that is signed by 20 percent or more of the parents or guardians who have children enrolled in the school or school district.

4. At the direction of the state board.

5. When the school budget review committee submits to the department a recommendation for a fiscal review pursuant to Iowa Code section 257.31(18).

(2) Phase II monitoring shall consist of a full desk audit of all monitoring requirements and an on-site visit to the school or school district for the purpose of determining the extent of noncompliance; the reason for lack of correction, if applicable; and a recommendation for corrective action to the director and the state board.

(3) Phase II monitoring requires the use of an accreditation committee appointed by the director. The accreditation committee shall be made up primarily of department staff but may request the assistance of third-party specialists at the discretion of the director. 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 school district or nonpublic school being visited.

(4) After visiting the school district or nonpublic school, the accreditation committee shall, within 30 days, determine whether the accreditation standards have been met and shall make a report to the director, together with a recommendation on what enforcement actions, if any, should be recommended to the state board.

c. Enforcement.

(1) The department shall enforce the laws, regulations, and rules applicable to school districts and nonpublic schools consistent with the process outlined in this subrule. The department shall coordinate its enforcement of Iowa Code chapter 216 with the Iowa state civil rights commission to reduce duplication of efforts.

(2) If, after having an opportunity to correct, if permitted, a school district is found to be in noncompliance with federal education laws including but not limited to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq., as amended; the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964; or Iowa Code chapter 216; or Iowa Code section 279.73 or 279.74, the director shall recommend, and the state board may do, one of the following within 30 days of the finding of noncompliance:

1. Impose conditions on funding provided to a school district, including directing the use of school district funds and designating the school district a high-risk grantee under 2 CFR §200.207.

2. Withhold payment of state or federal funds to a school district, in whole or in part, until noncompliance is corrected. Initial withholding of state funds is at the discretion of the director for a period of 60 calendar days, after which it is subject to approval of the state board every 60 calendar days. Withholding of federal funds is subject to the governing federal statute or regulation.

(3) The director may use any of the following permitted enforcement mechanisms and shall exercise discretion to ensure that enforcement actions are proportionate to school district or nonpublic school noncompliance:

1. Advise the school district or nonpublic school on the availability of appropriate technical assistance.

2. Require the school district or nonpublic school to complete a corrective action plan or plan for improvement by a reasonable deadline.

3. Recommend a phase II visit to the school district or nonpublic school to the state board.

4. Refer conduct of school district or nonpublic school staff or school board members, or school authorities, to the office of the attorney general for investigation.

5. Refer financial concerns to the auditor of state for investigation.

6. Recommend removal of accreditation of the school district or school to the state board.

7. Take any other enforcement mechanism available to the director.

(4) The department shall focus enforcement activities on all of the following:

1. Improving educational results for children, families, and students.

2. Ensuring that public agencies and their governing boards meet requirements of state and federal laws.

ITEM 5. Adopt the following **new** subrule 12.8(5):

12.8(5) Loss of accreditation.

a. If the recommendation pursuant to subrule 12.8(4) 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.

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

c. 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.

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

e. 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.

f. 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.

ITEM 6. Amend **281—Chapter 12**, Division IX, heading, as follows:

EXEMPTION REQUEST FLEXIBLE STUDENT AND SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM PROCESS

ITEM 7. Rescind rule 281—12.9(256) and adopt the following new rule in lieu thereof:

281—12.9(256) Flexible student and school support program.

12.9(1) General. The state board shall establish a flexible student and school support program to be administered by the director. Under the program, upon request of the board of directors of a public school district or the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school, the director may, for a period not to exceed three years, grant the applicable board of directors or the authority in charge of the nonpublic school the ability to use the flexible student and school support program to implement evidence-based practices in innovative ways to enhance student learning, well-being, and postsecondary success.

12.9(2) Exemptions available. Approval to participate in the flexible student and school support program shall exempt the school district or nonpublic school from one or more of the requirements of the educational program specified in subrule 12.5(3), 12.5(4), 12.5(5), 12.5(12), 12.5(13), 12.5(19), or 12.5(20), or the minimum school calendar requirements in subrule 12.1(7). An exemption shall be granted only if the director deems that the request made is an essential part of an educational program

to support student learning, well-being, and postsecondary success; is necessary for the success of the program; and is broadly consistent with the intent of the requirements of the educational program specified in subrule 12.5(3), 12.5(4), 12.5(5), 12.5(12), 12.5(13), 12.5(19), or 12.5(20), or the minimum school calendar requirements in subrule 12.1(7).

12.9(3) *Use of funds.* Approval to participate in the flexible student and school support program shall include authority for a school district to use funds from the school district's flexibility account under Iowa Code section 298A.2(2) to implement all or part of the flexible student and school support program.

12.9(4) *Application.* The application for the flexible student and school support program shall include all of the following and be submitted on forms and in a format prescribed by the department:

a. A description of the proposed educational program, including evidence used to design the program and evidence of involvement of board members, parents, students, community members, and staff in development of the program.

b. Program goals and measures of program effectiveness and success, including student success and performance.

c. A plan for program administration, including the use of personnel, facilities, and funding.

d. A plan for evaluation of the proposed program on at least an annual basis, including a plan for program revisions, if necessary.

e. The estimated financial impact of the program on the school district or nonpublic school.

12.9(5) *Exemptions not available.* Approval to participate in the program does not exempt the school district or nonpublic school from federal law or any other requirements of state law that are not specifically exempted by the director.

12.9(6) *Annual report to the department.* Each school district or nonpublic school approved to participate in the flexible student and school support program shall file an annual report with the department on the status of the program on forms and in a format prescribed by the department.

12.9(7) *Renewal.* Participation in the flexible student and school support program may be renewed for additional periods of years, each not to exceed three years. The director may revoke approval of all or part of any application or approved education program if the annual report or any other information available to the department indicates that conditions no longer warrant use of an exemption or funding from the school district's flexibility account under Iowa Code section 298A.2(2). Notice of revocation must be provided by the director to the school district or nonpublic school prior to the beginning of the school year for which participation is revoked.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For replacement pages for IAC, see IAC Supplement 4/20/22.