

CHAPTER 72  
ACCREDITATION OF AREA EDUCATION AGENCIES

**281—72.1(273) Scope.** The purpose of Iowa’s early childhood through twelfth grade educational system is to support learning for all students. Area education agencies, as part of that system, exist to provide leadership and equitable services for school improvement to schools and school districts in order to enable every learner to perform at higher education levels. Area education agencies are subject to accreditation by the state board of education as specified in Iowa Code section 273.10. These rules apply to the accreditation of area education agencies.

**281—72.2(273) Definitions.**

“*AEA*” is an acronym for area education agency.

“*Agencywide goals*” means cross-divisional desired targets to be reached over an extended period of time, derived from agencywide needs assessment and state and local student learning needs, and upon which services are focused.

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

“*Board*” means the Iowa state board of education.

“*Department*” means the state department of education.

“*Director*” means the state director of the department of education.

“*Equitable*” means that services provided by an AEA are accessible to all schools and school districts within the agency’s service region.

“*External knowledge base*” means what is known, such as research and student achievement data, from the state or the nation about how learners in other settings perform and respond in a content area such as reading, mathematics, or science, as well as what is known about developing a learning environment that will support the desired student performance and response in a content area such as reading, mathematics, or science.

“*Indicators of improvement*” means internal data the agency uses to determine how well its continuous improvement processes are implemented.

“*Indicators of quality*” means external data sources which measure the effectiveness of services.

“*School*” means an accredited nonpublic school.

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

“*State indicators*” means the school and school district indicators defined in 281—paragraph 12.8(3) “a.”

**281—72.3(273) Accreditation components.** To be accredited by the board and maintain accreditation status, an AEA shall: provide services which meet the standards defined in rule 281—72.4(273), establish a comprehensive improvement plan as defined in rule 281—72.9(273), submit a board-approved annual budget as defined in subrule 72.10(1), and annually provide a progress report as defined in subrule 72.10(2).

**281—72.4(273) Standards for services.** An AEA shall provide services that meet these standards as evidenced by, but not limited to, the descriptors following each standard. These services shall be accessible to all schools and school districts within the agency’s service region.

**72.4(1)** The AEA shall deliver services for school-community planning. The AEA assists schools and school districts in assessing needs of all students, developing collaborative relationships among community agencies, establishing shared direction, implementing actions to meet goals, and reporting progress towards goals.

**72.4(2)** The AEA shall deliver professional development services for schools, school districts and AEA instructional, administrative, and support personnel. The AEA anticipates and responds to schools’ and school districts’ needs; supports proven and emerging educational practices; aligns with school and school district comprehensive long-range and annual improvement goals; uses adult learning theory;

supports improved teaching; uses theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching; and addresses professional development activities as required by the Iowa Code or administrative rules.

**72.4(3)** The AEA shall deliver curriculum, instruction, and assessment services that address the areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, and science but may also be applied to other curriculum areas. These services support the development, implementation, and assessment of rigorous content standards in, but not limited to, reading, mathematics, and science. The AEA assists schools and school districts in gathering and analyzing student achievement data as well as data about the learning environment, compares those data to the external knowledge base, and uses that information to guide school and school district goal setting and implementation of actions to improve student learning.

**72.4(4)** The AEA shall address the diverse learning needs of all children and youth, including but not limited to services which address gifted and talented students, and meet the unique needs of students with disabilities who require special education. Services provide support to schools and school districts and include special education compliance with Iowa administrative rules for special education.

**72.4(5)** The AEA shall provide services that support multicultural, gender-fair approaches to the educational program pursuant to Iowa Code section 256.11. These services assist schools and school districts to take actions that ensure all students are free from discriminatory acts and practices; to establish policies and take actions that ensure all students are free from harassment; to incorporate into the educational program instructional strategies and student activities related to responsibilities, rights, and the respect for diversity which are necessary for successful citizenship in a diverse community and a global economy; and to incorporate on an ongoing basis activities within professional development that prepare and assist all employees to work effectively with diverse learners.

**72.4(6)** The AEA shall deliver media services. These services align with school and school district needs, support effective instruction, and provide consultation, research and information services, instructional resources, and materials preparation and dissemination to assist schools and school districts to meet the learning needs of all students and support local district media services. These services support the implementation of content standards in, but not limited to, reading, mathematics, and science. These services also support and integrate emerging technology.

**72.4(7)** The AEA shall supplement and support effective instruction for all students through school technology services. These services provide technology planning, technical assistance, and professional development, and support the incorporation of instructional technologies to improve student achievement. These services support the implementation of content standards in, but not limited to, reading, mathematics, and science. These services support and integrate emerging technology.

**72.4(8)** The AEA shall deliver services that develop leadership based upon the Iowa Standards for School Administrators as adopted by the board of educational examiners. Leadership services assist with recruitment, induction, retention, and professional development of educational leaders. AEAs develop and deliver leadership programs based on local and state educational needs and best practices.

**72.4(9)** The AEA shall deliver management services if requested. If the AEA provides management services to school districts, the services shall conform to the provisions of Iowa Code section 273.7A.

**72.4(10)** The AEA shall maintain a program and services evaluation and reporting system, consistent with the requirements of this chapter.

**72.4(11)** The AEA shall provide support for school district libraries in accordance with Iowa Code section 273.2(4).

**72.4(12)** The AEA shall provide support for early childhood service coordination for families and children to meet health, safety, and learning needs, including service coordination under 281—Chapter 120.

[ARC 6981C, IAB 4/19/23, effective 5/24/23]

**281—72.5 to 72.8** Reserved.

**281—72.9(273) Comprehensive improvement plan.** Each AEA, on a cycle established by the department, shall submit to the department a comprehensive improvement plan. The plan shall be

the basis for the improvement actions taken by the agency and shall also serve as a basis for the comprehensive site visit.

**72.9(1) Comprehensive improvement plan contents.** At a minimum, the comprehensive improvement plan for an AEA shall include the following:

*a. Needs assessment.* The plan shall contain a description of how the AEA conducts ongoing needs assessment.

*b. Needs assessment summary.* The plan shall contain a summary of the findings from agencywide needs assessment. The summary, at a minimum, shall include the following:

(1) Findings from AEA internal needs assessment which includes, at a minimum, four indicators of improvement:

1. Implementation of a continuous improvement model;
2. Implementation of services that respond to schools' and school districts' needs;
3. Demonstration of proactive leadership;
4. Use of data to implement actions to improve student learning;
- (2) Findings from school and school district state indicator data;
- (3) Findings from reviews of school and school district comprehensive school improvement plans;
- (4) Findings from the department's comprehensive site visit reports to schools and school districts;
- (5) Findings from AEA comprehensive site visit reports; and
- (6) Findings from the department's statewide customer service survey.

*c. Agencywide goals.* The plan shall contain agencywide goals developed as a result of needs assessment findings. Agencywide goals shall be measurable and, at a minimum, focused on assisting schools and school districts with the school improvement process and improving teaching and learning as evidenced in the indicators of quality as prescribed in subrule 72.10(2).

*d. Services.* The plan shall describe the services developed to meet agencywide goals and to meet the standards defined in this chapter.

*e. Action plans.* The plan shall include agencywide actions to accomplish agencywide goals. Action plans shall include evidence of meeting all standards for services. Action plans shall include provisions for equitable availability of services. The agencywide action plans shall include, at a minimum, the following components:

- (1) Agencywide data sources;
- (2) Agencywide baseline data;
- (3) Services to meet the agencywide goals;
- (4) Agencywide resources, which include funding, staff allocation, and time and may be delivered directly, through contractual agreements, and through collaborative arrangements with other educational or community agencies;
- (5) Agencywide responsible parties that will monitor the implementation of services in the action plan;
- (6) A system for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of services; and
- (7) A process for reporting progress toward agencywide goals.

*f. Provisions for management services.* If the AEA provides management services to school districts, the plan shall include a description of how the agency provides those services as described in Iowa Code section 273.7A.

*g. Professional development plan.* The plan shall contain a summary of the agencywide professional development plan developed pursuant to 281—subrule 83.6(2).

**72.9(2) Plan submission and cycle.** Rescinded IAB 9/5/01, effective 10/10/01.

**72.9(3) Comprehensive improvement plan review process.** The comprehensive improvement plan of an AEA shall be reviewed by the department to determine if the plan meets the requirements of this chapter. An AEA will be provided reasonable time to correct any deficiencies.

**281—72.10(273) Annual budget and annual progress report.** Each AEA shall submit to the board an annual budget as required by Iowa Code section 273.3 and shall provide an annual progress report on the indicators of quality and the agencywide goals.

**72.10(1) Annual budget.** An annual budget shall be submitted by an AEA accredited by the board or an AEA that has been given conditional accreditation by the board as described in Iowa Code section 273.3(12) and subrule 72.11(4) to the board for approval, on forms provided by the department, no later than March 15 preceding the next fiscal year. The board shall review the proposed budget and shall, before April 1, either grant approval or return the budget without approval with comments of the board included. An unapproved budget shall be resubmitted to the board for final approval no later than April 15.

**72.10(2) Annual progress report.** An AEA shall annually submit a written progress report to its schools and school districts and the department and make the report available to the public. The report shall include, but not be limited to, the following information:

*a. Agencywide goals.* Progress, at a minimum, toward the agencywide goals described in paragraph 72.9(1)“c” shall be reported. This progress shall include agencywide baseline data and changes in the baseline data as a result of services provided in each action plan.

*b. Indicators of quality.* Aggregated agencywide data shall include baseline data and trends over time for the following indicators of quality from, at a minimum, the state indicators, the statewide customer service survey, school and school district comprehensive school improvement plans, and school and school district annual progress reports:

(1) Targeted assistance. An AEA assists schools and school districts with specific student, teacher, and school needs evidenced in local school improvement plans by:

1. Addressing teacher, school and school district needs.
2. Responding to student learning needs.

(2) Improved student learning. An AEA assists schools and school districts in:

1. Improving student achievement in mathematics.
2. Improving student achievement in reading.
3. Improving student achievement in science.
4. Reducing student achievement gaps in mathematics.
5. Reducing student achievement gaps in reading.
6. Reducing student achievement gaps in science.
7. Reducing dropout rates.
8. Preparing students for postsecondary success.
9. Planning to ensure that students complete a core program.

(3) Improved teaching. An AEA assists schools and school districts in improving teaching in the following areas:

1. Mathematics.
2. Reading.
3. Science.

(4) Resource management. An AEA assists schools and school districts:

1. By delivering cost-efficient services.
2. By timely delivery of services.

(5) Customer satisfaction with services. An AEA determines customer satisfaction through:

1. High levels of participation.
2. High levels of customer satisfaction with quality of AEA services.

(6) Annual progress report review process. The annual progress report of an AEA shall be reviewed by a team appointed by the director. Following the review of an AEA’s report, feedback will be provided to the agency.

**281—72.11(273) Comprehensive site visit.**

**72.11(1) On-site review.** An accreditation team shall conduct one or more on-site reviews of the AEA’s progress toward agencywide goals and shall determine if services meet the standards in this chapter. Prior to an on-site review of an AEA, the accreditation team shall have access to the AEA’s comprehensive improvement plan, annual progress report, and annual budget as well as any other information collected by the department relating to the AEA.

**72.11(2) Accreditation team.** The membership of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director. Each team member should have appropriate competencies, background, and experiences to enable the member to contribute to the evaluation visit. The team shall include at least four members, including, but not limited to:

- a. Department staff.
- b. Representatives from various sizes of schools and school districts served by the AEA being evaluated.
- c. AEA staff from other AEAs.
- d. Others with expertise as deemed appropriate by the director.

**72.11(3) Accreditation team action.** After an on-site review of an AEA, the accreditation team shall determine whether the requirements of this chapter have been met and shall make a report to the director identifying which standards and other accreditation requirements in this chapter an AEA has or has not met. The accreditation team shall report strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each standard or requirement, and shall advise the AEA of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance the strengths and improve areas of weakness. An AEA may respond to the accreditation team's report by providing to the board factual information concerning its services.

**72.11(4) Accreditation.** All AEAs shall be deemed accredited upon the date of implementation of these rules. Accreditation of an AEA by the board shall be based on the recommendation of the director after study of the factual and evaluative evidence on record about the standards and other requirements as described in this chapter and based upon the timely submission of information required by the department. If, at any time, the board determines that an AEA has not met all standards and other requirements, the board shall require the AEA to address the deficiencies.

a. *Accreditation status.* After completion of the comprehensive site visit under rule 281—72.11(273), the board shall grant continuation of accreditation if all standards and other requirements are met. If the board determines that an AEA has not met all standards and other requirements, the board shall grant conditional accreditation to the agency.

b. *Conditional accreditation.* If the board grants conditional accreditation, the department shall notify the administrator of the AEA and each member of the board of directors of the AEA within 15 days. The notice shall contain a description of the accreditation deficiencies.

c. *Remediation plan.* Upon granting of conditional accreditation by the board, the director, in cooperation with the board of directors of the AEA, shall establish a remediation plan. The remediation plan shall describe how the AEA will correct deficiencies to meet accreditation standards and shall establish a timeline and deadline date for correction of the deficiencies. The remediation plan is subject to the approval of the board. The AEA shall remain conditionally accredited during the implementation of the remediation plan.

d. *Implementation of remediation plan.* At intervals prescribed in the remediation plan or at the request of the director, the accreditation team shall revisit the AEA and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the accreditation standards are being or have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the board. The board shall review this report and recommendations and shall determine whether the deficiencies have been corrected.

e. *Failure to correct deficiencies.* If the deficiencies have not been corrected within the time stipulated in the remediation plan, the board shall remove accreditation of the agency. At the hearing before the board, the AEA may be represented by counsel and may present evidence. The board may provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported. If requested by the AEA at least 10 days before the hearing, the board shall provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported at the expense of the AEA. Within 30 days after the hearing, the board shall render a written decision approving or removing the accreditation. Action by the board at this time is final agency action for the purposes of Iowa Code chapter 17A. The department shall notify the administrator of the AEA, each member of the board of directors of the AEA, and the schools and school districts served by the AEA of the decision of the board.

*f. Required response to removal of accreditation.* After removal of accreditation of the agency, the AEA board of directors shall make provisions for the continuation of services to schools and school districts subject to approval by the state board of education.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code section 273.10.

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