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Legal Services Division

Legislative Guide

Department of Education

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this Legislative Guide is to familiarize the reader with the Iowa Department of Education (Department of Education) and the entities governed by the Department of Education. The Guide does not evaluate any aspect of the operations of the Department of Education or the entities governed by the Department of Education. Unless otherwise indicated, references in the Guide to the Iowa Code are to the 2027 Iowa Code. References to the Iowa Administrative Code are current through July 2, 2026.

II. History

A. Constitutional Provisions

Iowa's history of regulating elementary and secondary education stretches back to Iowa's first Constitution, which was ratified in 1846. The 1846 Constitution of the State of Iowa (1846 Constitution) required the General Assembly to "provide for the election by the people of a superintendent of public instruction, who shall hold his office for three years, and whose duties shall be prescribed by law . . . ."[1] The 1846 Constitution also required the General Assembly to "provide for a system of common schools, by which a school shall be kept up and supported in each school district, at least three months in every year . . . ."[2]

A constitutional convention was called in 1855, and in 1857, Iowans ratified the Constitution the state currently operates under. The 1857 Constitution of the State of Iowa (1857 Constitution) provides that, instead of a superintendent of public instruction being in charge of regulating public education,

> [t]he educational interest of the State, including common schools and other educational institutions, shall be under the management of a board of education, which shall consist of the lieutenant governor . . . and one member to be elected from each judicial district in the state.[3]

Under the 1857 Constitution, the Board of Education was required to "provide for the education of all the youths of the state, through a system of common schools and such school shall be organized and kept in each school district at least three months in each year . . . ."[4]

The 1857 Constitution goes into detail about the election of members to the Board of Education[5] and how the Board of Education was to go about its business.[6] The 1857 Constitution also authorized the Board of Education to

> legislate and make all needful rules and regulations in relation to common schools, and other educational institutions, that are instituted, to receive aid from the school or university fund of this state: but all acts, rules, and regulations of said board may be altered, amended or repealed by the General Assembly; and when so altered, amended, or repealed they shall not be re-enacted by the board of education.[7]

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1 Iowa Const. of 1846, art. IX, §1.
2 Iowa Const. of 1846, art. IX, §3.
3 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §1.
4 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §12.
5 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §3.
6 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §§4, 5, 6, 7.
7 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §8.

B. Iowa Acts Provisions

1. 1864 Iowa Acts, Chapter 52

These provisions of the 1857 Constitution are now largely obsolete because of article IX, division 1, section 15, which expressly authorizes the General Assembly to, at any time after the year 1863, "abolish or reorganize said board of education, and provide for the educational interest of the state in any other manner that to them shall seem best and proper."[8] In 1864, the General Assembly did just that with 1864 Iowa Acts, chapter 52, which did several things:

- Abolished the Board of Education.[9]
- Required the General Assembly to elect a Superintendent of Public Instruction, who would hold his office until the first day of January 1866. At the General Election of 1865, and every two years after that, a Superintendent of Public Instruction was to be elected by popular vote in the same manner as other State officers.[10]
- Charged the Superintendent of Public Instruction with the general supervision of all common schools of the State and with the responsibility to render a written opinion to any school officer requesting one regarding the administration of any school law.[11]
- Required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to recommend books to be used for textbooks and for school libraries.[12]
- Required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to report to the General Assembly several pieces of information related to public instruction, including the condition of the common schools and the number of teachers, schoolhouses, and books in school libraries.[13]

One possibility for why the General Assembly abolished the Board of Education and moved back to having a Superintendent of Public Instruction was to be able to assert more authority over the education system. In 1858, the General Assembly passed a fairly comprehensive education bill that was signed into law. Later that same year, in *District Township of the City of Dubuque v. City of Dubuque*, the Iowa Supreme Court struck down that law because, pursuant to the 1857 Constitution of the State of Iowa, it was the Board of Education that had the authority to manage the educational interests of the State and to "legislate and make all needful rules and regulations in relation to Common Schools," not the General Assembly.[14]

2. 1913 Iowa Acts, Chapter 103

1913 Iowa Acts, chapter 103, required the Governor to nominate, and with the consent of two-thirds of the Senate, appoint, a Superintendent of Public Instruction during the 36th General Assembly, and every four years after that. The term of the existing Superintendent of Public Instruction, who was elected by the public, was extended until the nomination and appointment of the new Superintendent of Public Instruction.[15] The new Superintendent of Public Instruction was required to be a graduate of an institution of higher education and to have had at least five years of experience as a teacher or a school superintendent.[16] The new Superintendent of Public Instruction was largely charged with the

8 Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §15.
9 1864 Iowa Acts, ch. 52, §1.
10 1864 Iowa Acts, ch. 52, §2.
11 1864 Iowa Acts, ch. 52, §5.
12 1864 Iowa Acts, ch. 52, §6.
13 1864 Iowa Acts, ch. 52, §10.
14 Dist. Twp. of the City of Dubuque v. City of Dubuque, 7 Clarke 262, 285 (Iowa 1858).
15 1913 Iowa Acts, ch. 103, §1.
16 1913 Iowa Acts, ch. 103, §2.

same responsibilities as the former Board of Education.[17] Importantly, 1913 Iowa Acts, chapter 103, required that the Superintendent of Public Instruction's office be known as the Department of Public Instruction.[18]

3. 1945 Iowa Acts, Chapter 131

1945 Iowa Acts, chapter 131, created a Division of Special Education within the Department of Public Instruction for the promotion, direction, and supervision of special education for children with disabilities.[19] The Division of Special Education was given the authority to do several different things: aid school districts in the organization of special schools, classes, and instructional facilities for children with disabilities; establish standards for teachers who provided educational services to children with disabilities; purchase and acquire special equipment and other aids for use in special education, and loan or lease the equipment to school districts; and prescribe courses of study and curricula for the instruction of children with disabilities.[20]

4. 1953 Iowa Acts, Chapter 114

In 1953, the General Assembly reorganized the system of education in 1953 Iowa Acts, chapter 114. Chapter 114 did several things:

- Established a State Board of Public Instruction consisting of nine members.[21] The Governor appointed one member of the State Board of Public Instruction, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The other eight members of the State Board of Public Instruction were elected from Iowa's then eight congressional districts.[22]
- Empowered the State Board of Public Instruction to, among other things:
  - "Determine and adopt such policies as are authorized by law and are necessary for the more efficient operation of any phase of public education."[23]
  - "Adopt necessary rules and regulations for the proper enforcement and execution of the provisions of school laws."[24]
  - "Adopt a long-range program for the state system of public education based upon special studies, surveys, research, and recommendations submitted or proposed under the direction of the state superintendent of public instruction."[25]
- Transferred the duties of the State Board for Vocational Education and the Board of Educational Examiners, the entity responsible for licensing teachers, to the new State Board of Public Instruction.[26]

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17 Compare 1913 Iowa Acts, ch. 103, §3 (providing the Superintendent of Public Instruction with the power of "general supervision and control over the rural, graded, and high schools of the state"), with Iowa Const. art. IX, div. 1, §8 (providing the Board of Education with "full power and authority to legislate and make all needful rules and regulations in relation to common schools").

18 1913 Iowa Acts, ch. 103, §3.

19 1945 Iowa Acts, ch. 131, §1.

20 1945 Iowa Acts, ch. 131, §3.

21 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §1.

22 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §3.

23 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §9(1).

24 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §9(2).

25 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §10(8).

26 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §10(10), (11).

- Required the State Board of Public Instruction to appoint a Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Senate.[27] The Superintendent of Public Instruction would then serve as the executive officer of the State Board of Public Instruction.[28]

The Superintendent of Public Instruction was tasked with: exercising "general supervision over the state system of public education, including the public elementary and secondary schools[,]" junior colleges, and nonpublic schools "to the extent that it is necessary to ascertain compliance with the provisions of Iowa school laws . . ."; advising the State Board of Public Instruction on all matters pertaining to education, recommending to the State Board of Public Instruction such matters as in their judgment are necessary to be acted upon, and when approved, to execute the same when directed by the State Board of Public Instruction; recommending to the State Board of Public Instruction for adoption such policies pertaining to the state system of public education as they may consider necessary for its more efficient operations; and carrying out all orders of the State Board of Public Instruction not inconsistent with State law.[29]

1953 Iowa Acts, chapter 114, also established a Department of Public Instruction to act as an administrative, supervisory, and consultative agency under the direction of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Public Instruction. The Department of Public Instruction was tasked with assisting the Superintendent of Public Instruction in carrying out the policies, procedures, and duties authorized by the regulations of the State Board of Public Instruction.[30]

5. 1965 Iowa Acts, Chapters 226 and 247

1965 Iowa Acts, chapter 226, required the State Board of Public Instruction to establish standards, regulations, and rules for the approval of all public and private schools in Iowa. Those approval standards, regulations, and rules were required to prescribe and implement a curriculum to be taught in the elementary and secondary schools.[31]

The curriculum was divided into grade levels: nursery school, kindergarten, grades 1 through 6, grades 7 and 8, and grades 9 through 12. Nursery school activities were to be designed to help children use and manage their bodies, extend their interests and understanding of the world around them, work and play with others, and to express themselves. The kindergarten programs were required to include experiences designed to develop emotional and social living, protection and development of physical being, growth in expression, and language arts and communication readiness. In grades one through six, the required instruction areas included: language arts, which included handwriting and spelling; social studies, which included geography, history of the United States and Iowa, cultures of other peoples and nations, and American citizenship; mathematics; science, which included conservation of natural resources; health and physical education; music; and art. Meanwhile, the required instruction areas in grades seven and eight included: science, mathematics, social studies, language arts, reading, physical education, music, and art. High schools were required to teach the following minimum annual program: four units of science; four units of social sciences, including American history, American government, and economics; four units of English language arts; four units of a sequential program in mathematics; one unit of general mathematics; two units of a foreign language; one unit of physical education; five units of practical arts, which included business education; industrial arts; homemaking; agriculture; distributive education; and health occupations.[32]

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27 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §11.
28 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §16.
29 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §17.
30 1953 Iowa Acts, ch. 114, §19.
31 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 226, §2.
32 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 226, §2.

1965 Iowa Acts, chapter 247, created the State's vocational school and community college (college) system. 1965 Iowa Acts, chapter 247, divided the State into 20 geographic areas and required each to operate either a vocational school or a community college.[33] The planning and development of these schools and colleges was mostly handled at the local level, but the State Board of Public Instruction had to give final approval for such plans.[34] In addition, the State Board of Public Instruction was authorized to change the boundaries of the areas into which the State was divided for purposes of these schools and colleges, administer State and federal moneys that were made available to the schools and colleges, and approve sites and buildings to be acquired by the schools or colleges.[35] 1965 Iowa Acts, chapter 247, also established a Division of Community and Junior Colleges within the State Department of Public Instruction and tasked the Division with overseeing the community and junior colleges.[36]

6. 1986 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1245

In 1986, there was a restructuring of State government. This restructuring was put into effect by 1986 Iowa Acts, chapter 1245. For purposes of this Guide, many of the changes were simply changes to the names of different entities and positions. For example, the State Board of Public Instruction became the State Board of Education.[37] In addition, the Superintendent of Public Instruction became the Director of the Department of Education.[38]

1986 Iowa Acts, chapter 1245, also gave the Governor the power to appoint the Director of the Department of Education, subject to Senate confirmation.[39] In addition, the Governor was given the power to appoint the nine members of the State Board of Education, subject to Senate confirmation.[40]

Subsequent to the 1986 restructuring, the State Board of Education maintained many of the duties and responsibilities already discussed; for example, the State Board of Education retained some oversight over special education and community colleges;[41] served as the State Board for Vocational Education;[42] and constituted the Board of Educational Examiners, the entity responsible for licensing teachers.[43]

7. 1989 Iowa Acts, Chapter 265

In 1989, the General Assembly altered the duties and responsibilities of the State Board of Education again. In 1989 Iowa Acts, chapter 265, the General Assembly established the Board of Educational Examiners as a mostly autonomous board outside of the State Board of Education.[44] When the General Assembly established the membership of this new Board of Educational Examiners, it required the Director of the Department of Education to serve not only as 1 of the 11 members of the board but also to serve as the chairperson of the board.[45]

33 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 247, §1.
34 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 247, §§5, 7.
35 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 247, §25.
36 1965 Iowa Acts, ch. 247, §27.
37 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §1403.
38 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §§1408, 1409.
39 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §1408.
40 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §1403.
41 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §§1470, 1476.
42 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §1435.
43 1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1245, §1407(3).
44 1989 Iowa Acts, ch. 265, §2.
45 1989 Iowa Acts, ch. 265, §3.

8. 1993 Iowa Acts, Chapter 48

In 1993, the General Assembly added two new divisions to the Department of Education: the Division of Libraries and Information Services and the Public Broadcasting Division.[46] These divisions were previously housed under the Department of Cultural Affairs.

The Division of Libraries and Information Services was administered by the State Librarian, who was appointed by the Commission of Libraries. The Commission of Libraries consisted of six members who were appointed by the Governor and one member who was appointed by the Iowa Supreme Court.[47] The Division of Libraries and Information Services was required to do several things, including: coordinate a statewide interregional interlibrary loan and information network among libraries in this State and support activities that increased cooperation among libraries; establish and administer a program for the collection and distribution of State publications to libraries; give libraries advice and counsel in specialized areas, including building construction and space utilization, children's services, and technological developments; and foster public awareness of the condition of libraries in this State and of methods to improve library services to the citizens of the State.[48]

The Public Broadcasting Division was overseen by an Administrator who was appointed by the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board.[49] The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board consisted of nine members, four of whom were appointed by the Governor and the other five of whom were appointed by various entities, including the State Board of Education, State Association of Private Colleges and Universities, community colleges, area education agencies, and the State Board of Regents.[50] The highest priority of the Public Broadcasting Division was educational programming,[51] and the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board was required to "plan, establish, and operate educational radio and television facilities and other telecommunication services to serve the educational needs of the state."[52]

9. 2023 Iowa Acts, Chapter 19

In 2023, there was another restructuring of State government, which was implemented by 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19. 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, moved the Iowa School for the Deaf and the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired program (formerly known as the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School), which were under the State Board of Regents, to under the Department of Education.[53] 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, also created a new division within the Department of Education known as the Innovation Division and moved the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Collaborative Initiative, which was under the University of Northern Iowa, to the new Innovation Division.[54] 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, created a new division within the Department of Education known as the Higher Education Division and moved the College Student Aid Commission and the Board of Educational Examiners to the new Higher Education Division.[55] In addition, 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, established the Community Colleges Bureau within the Higher Education Division and required that the Community Colleges Bureau "exercise the powers and perform the duties conferred by law upon the department with respect to community colleges."[56] 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, also established

46 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §§17, 38.
47 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §19.
48 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §18.
49 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §38.
50 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §39.
51 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §38.
52 1993 Iowa Acts, ch. 48, §39.
53 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §2479.
54 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §2515.
55 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §2521.
56 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §§2521, 2647.

the Community Colleges and Postsecondary Readiness Bureau within the Higher Education Division.[57] Finally, for purposes of this Guide, 2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 19, transferred the responsibilities associated with the Division of Libraries and Information Services to the Department of Administrative Services.[58]

III. General Information

A. State Board of Education

The State Board of Education consists of nine members. Seven members are voting members appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate.[59] Not more than five of the voting members are to be of the same political party. The voting members are prohibited from being "engaged in professional education for a major portion of the member's time" and from deriving "a major portion of income from any business or activity connected with education."[60] Voting members serve for six-year terms.[61]

The two nonvoting members of the State Board of Education are the Director of the Department of Workforce Development and a student member.[62] The nonvoting student member is also appointed by the Governor; however, the student member is not subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Governor is required to appoint the student member from a list of names submitted to the Governor by the State Board of Education. Students enrolled in grades 10 or 11 in a public school may apply to the State Board of Education to serve as the student member.[63]

The State Board of Education is generally required to "[a]dopt and establish policy for programs and services of the department pursuant to law."[64]

B. Director of the Department of Education

The Director of the Department of Education is appointed by the Governor, subject to confirmation by the Senate, and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. In terms of qualifications, the Director of the Department of Education is required to "possess a background in education and administrative experience."[65] The Director of the Department of Education is required to "[c]arry out programs and policies as determined by the state board."[66] In doing so, the Director of the Department of Education is authorized to "[e]mploy personnel and assign duties and responsibilities of the department."[67] The current director is McKenzie Snow who was appointed beginning June 26, 2023.

C. Department of Education

The Department of Education is "established to act in a policymaking and advisory capacity and to exercise general supervision over the state system of education,"[68] which includes:

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57 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §2526.
58 2023 Iowa Acts, ch. 19, §§1360-1382.
59 Iowa Code §256.3(1).
60 Iowa Code §256.3(2).
61 Iowa Code §256.3(3).
62 Iowa Code §256.3(1).
63 Iowa Code §256.5A.
64 Iowa Code §256.7(1).
65 Iowa Code §256.8.
66 Iowa Code §256.9(1).
67 Iowa Code §256.9(4).
68 Iowa Code §256.1(1).

> Public elementary and secondary schools[;] [c]ommunity colleges[;] [a]rea education agencies[;] [e]ducational supervision over the elementary and secondary schools under the control of the department of health and human services[;] [n]onpublic schools to the extent necessary for compliance with Iowa school laws[;] [t]he Iowa educational services for the blind and visually impaired program[;] [t]he Iowa school for the deaf[;] [t]he science, technology, engineering, and mathematics collaborative initiative[;] [t]he college student aid commission . . . [;] [t]he board of educational examiners . . . [;] and [c]areer and technical education programs offered by school districts or community colleges.[69]

D. Duties

1. General Duties of the State Board of Education

The Iowa Code assigns several different responsibilities to the State Board of Education. For example:

- The State Board of Education is required to "[p]rescribe standards and procedures for the approval of [teacher] preparation programs and professional development programs offered in this state by [institutions that offer teacher preparation programs] . . . and by area education agencies."[70]
- The State Board of Education is also required to "[a]dopt, and update annually, a five-year plan for the achievement of educational goals in Iowa."[71]
- The State Board of Education is tasked with hearing the "appeals of persons aggrieved by decisions of [school boards] and other appeals prescribed by law in a manner consistent with chapter 17A."[72] Iowa law authorizes a student, or the parent or guardian of the student if the student is a minor, who is aggrieved by a decision or order of a school board to, within 30 days after the school board's decision or order, appeal the decision or order to the State Board of Education.[73]
- Additionally, the State Board of Education is required to "[p]rescribe guidelines for facility standards, maximum class sizes, and maximum in classroom pupil-teacher and teacher-aide ratios for . . . kindergarten through [grade] three and before and after school and summer child care programs provided under the direction of the school district."[74]
- In terms of apprenticeships, the State Board of Education is required to "[a]dopt rules and a procedure for accrediting all apprenticeship programs in the state which receive state or federal funding." When it is developing those rules, the State Board of Education is required to "consult with schools and labor or trade organizations affected by or currently operating apprenticeship or training programs."[75]
- The State Board of Education is required to develop and adopt rules relating to the statewide summative assessments in mathematics and English language arts that are administered to students in grades 3 through 11, the statewide summative assessments in science that are administered to students in grades 5, 8, and 11, and the statewide summative assessments in social studies that are administered to students in grades 8 and 11.[76]

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69 Iowa Code §256.1(1)(a) - (k).
70 Iowa Code §256.7(3)(a).
71 Iowa Code §256.7(4).
72 Iowa Code §256.7(6).
73 Iowa Code §290.1.
74 Iowa Code §256.7(11).
75 Iowa Code §256.7(13).
76 Iowa Code §256.7(21)(b)(2).

- The State Board of Education is the entity responsible for adopting a core curriculum and establishing high school graduation requirements for all students enrolled in school districts and accredited nonpublic schools.[77]
- Finally, the State Board of Education is also responsible for adopting rules under Iowa Code chapter 17A for carrying out the responsibilities of the Department of Education.[78]

2. General Duties of the Department of Education

The Iowa Code assigns a multitude of responsibilities to the Director of the Department of Education, including all of the following:

- The Director is required to "[a]ccept and administer federal funds apportioned to the state for educational and rehabilitation purposes and accept surplus commodities for distribution when made available by a governmental agency."[79]
- The Director is responsible for "[c]onduct[ing] research on educational matters."[80]
- The Director is required to submit to the General Assembly "recommendations related to revisions or amendments to the school laws."[81]
- The Director also is given the authority to "[i]nterpret the school laws and rules relating to the school laws."[82]
  - In *Hills & Dales Child Development Center v. Iowa Department of Education*, the Iowa Supreme Court relied in part on this provision in holding that the Department of Education was permitted to issue declaratory orders interpreting Iowa's compulsory attendance laws as they relate to federal education laws.[83]
  - In *Iowa Association of School Boards v. Iowa Department of Education*, the Iowa Supreme Court relied in part on this provision in holding that the Iowa Department of Education was permitted to issue declaratory rulings related to certain taxes levied by school districts.[84]
- The Director also is required to "[d]etermine by inspection, supervision, or otherwise, the condition, needs, and progress of the schools under the supervision of the department, [and] make recommendations to the proper authorities for the correction of deficiencies and the educational and physical improvement of schools . . . ."[85]
- The Director is responsible for "[c]lassify[ing] and defin[ing] the various schools under the supervision of the department, formulat[ing] suitable courses of study, and publish[ing] and distribut[ing] the classifications and courses of study . . . ."[86]
- The Director is tasked with developing standards and instructional materials to assist school districts in developing appropriate before and after school programs, child care services and programs, and curricula for all-day kindergarten programs.[87]

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77 Iowa Code §256.7(26)(a).
78 Iowa Code §256.7(5).
79 Iowa Code §256.9(7).
80 Iowa Code §256.9(9).
81 Iowa Code §256.9(10).
82 Iowa Code §256.9(16).
83 Hills & Dales Child Dev. Ctr. v. Iowa Dep't of Educ., 968 N.W.2d 238 (Iowa 2021).
84 Iowa Ass'n of Sch. Bds. v. Iowa Dep't of Educ., 739 N.W.2d 303 (Iowa 2007).
85 Iowa Code §256.9(20).
86 Iowa Code §256.9(24).
87 Iowa Code §256.9(31).

- The Director is required to provide resources and assistance to schools "relating to the implementation of nutritional guidelines for food and beverages sold on school grounds . . . ."[88]
- The Director is responsible for developing and implementing "a comprehensive management information system designed for the purpose of establishing standardized electronic data collections and reporting protocols that facilitate compliance with state and federal reporting requirements."[89]
- The Director is required to develop standards applicable to school administrators in this State.[90]
- The Director is authorized to grant to school districts and accredited nonpublic schools "waivers from statutory obligations with which the [schools] cannot reasonably comply within two years after a disaster."[91]
- The Director is required to develop and distribute to schools a comprehensive State mathematics plan that is designed to increase the level of mathematics proficiency attained by students.[92]

IV. Divisions, Bureaus, and Commissions

A. Public Broadcasting Division

The Public Broadcasting Division is overseen by an administrator who is appointed by the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board.[93] The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board consists of nine members, four of whom are appointed by the Governor and the other five of whom are appointed by various entities.[94] The highest priority of the Public Broadcasting Division is educational programming,[95] and the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is required to "plan, establish, and operate educational radio and television facilities and other telecommunications services to serve the educational needs of the state."[96]

The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is required to "appoint an advisory committee on journalistic and editorial integrity."[97] Further, to preserve the integrity of its editorial process, the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is authorized to "select programming, content partners, and other authorized contractual services without using a competitive selection process or performance measures that may otherwise be required by law for such services."[98] The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is responsible for applying for the channels, frequencies, licenses, and permits necessary for the performance of its duties.[99] The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is authorized to "purchase, lease, and improve property, equipment, and services for educational telecommunications . . . and may dispose of property and equipment when not necessary for its purposes."[100]

Under Iowa law, it is the intent of the General Assembly that the Public Broadcasting Division not compete with the private sector by actively seeking revenue from its operations unless certain

88 Iowa Code §256.9(34).
89 Iowa Code §256.9(44).
90 Iowa Code §256.9(47).
91 Iowa Code §256.9(53).
92 Iowa Code §256.9(73).
93 Iowa Code §256.81(1).
94 Iowa Code §256.82(1).
95 Iowa Code §256.81(1).
96 Iowa Code §256.82(1).
97 Iowa Code §256.82(3)(a).
98 Iowa Code §256.84(8).
99 Iowa Code §256.84(2).
100 Iowa Code §256.84(1).

conditions are met.[101] Specifically, the Public Broadcasting Division may receive revenue from providing services, products, and the usage of facilities and equipment if:

> [t]he service, product, or usage is not reasonably available in the private sector[;] [t]he [Public Broadcasting Division] can provide the service, product, or usage at a time, price, location, or terms that are not reasonably available through the private sector[;] [or] [t]he service, product, or usage is deemed by the [Public Broadcasting Division] to be related to public service or the educational mission of the [Public Broadcasting Division].[102]

B. Innovation Division

The Innovation Division's sole responsibility is the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Collaborative Initiative. The overall goal of the STEM Collaborative Initiative is to support "activities directly related to recruitment of prekindergarten through grade [12] mathematics and science teachers for ongoing mathematics and science programming for students . . ."[103] while prioritizing student interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.[104]

The STEM Collaborative Initiative is required to "identify, recruit, prepare, and support the best mathematics and science teachers" and to "reach every student and every teacher in every school district in the state . . . ."[105] In terms of how the STEM Collaborative Initiative goes about preparing and supporting teachers, the Innovation Division is required to collaborate with the community colleges to "develop science, technology, engineering, and mathematics professional development programs for community college instructors and for purposes of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics curricula development."[106]

In addition, subject to an appropriation, the Innovation Division is also to administer three different things:

- First, "[r]egional science, technology, engineering, and mathematics networks for Iowa, the purpose of which is to equalize [STEM] education enrichment opportunities available to learners . . . . The innovation division [is to] establish six geographically similar regional [STEM] networks across Iowa that complement and leverage existing resources . . . . Each network [is to] be managed by a highly qualified [STEM] advocate positioned at a network hub to be determined through a competitive application process. Oversight for each regional network [is] provided by a regional advisory board [the members of which are appointed by the Governor] . . . . The membership is required to represent prekindergarten through grade twelve school districts and schools, and higher education, business, nonprofit organizations, youth agencies, and other appropriate stakeholders."[107]
- Second, "[a] focused array of the best [STEM] enrichment opportunities, selected through a competitive application process, that can be expanded to meet future needs . . . ."[108]
- Third, "[s]tatewide [STEM] programming [that is] designed to increase participation of students and teachers in successful learning experiences; to increase the number of [STEM]-related teaching majors

[101] Iowa Code §256.86(1).
[102] Iowa Code §256.86(2)(a)(1) - (3).
[103] Iowa Code §256.111(3).
[104] Iowa Code §256.111(4).
[105] Iowa Code §256.111(4).
[106] Iowa Code §256.111(4).
[107] Iowa Code §256.111(5)(a).
[108] Iowa Code §256.111(5)(b).

offered by the state's universities; to elevate public awareness of the opportunities; and to increase collaboration and partnerships."[109]

C. Higher Education Division

The administrator of the Higher Education Division is responsible for administering and coordinating the Community Colleges and Post-Secondary Readiness Bureau, the Board of Educational Examiners, the College Student Aid Commission, and the Community Colleges Bureau.[110]

1. Community Colleges and Post-Secondary Readiness Bureau

The work of the Community Colleges and Post-Secondary Readiness Bureau is mostly focused on carrying out Iowa's responsibilities under the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, which was most recently reauthorized in 2018. The Act provides almost $1.43 billion in federal support for career and technical education (CTE) programs in all 50 states, including support for integrated career pathway programs for students. Iowa receives approximately $13.9 million annually in federal funds under the Act, divided amongst secondary and postsecondary CTE programs delivered through public school districts and community colleges.[111]

To help school districts and community colleges in delivering high-quality CTE programs, the Iowa Code establishes regional career and technical education planning partnerships. These partnerships are required to do all of the following:

- "Provide for the active participation of school districts and community colleges in the delivery of career and technical education in the region."[112]
- "Provide for the participation of representatives of business and industry and representatives of sector partnerships and community stakeholders."[113]
- "Promote career and college readiness through thoughtful career guidance and purposeful academic and technical planning practices."[114]
- "Promote high-quality, integrated career and technical education programming . . . comprised of secondary exploratory and transitory coursework to prepare students for higher-level, specialized academic and technical training aligned with labor market needs."[115]
- "Provide for increased and equitable access to high-quality career and technical education programs through the planning and development of a system of regional centers."[116]
- "Secur[e] collaboration with secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, and employers to ensure the creation of high-quality career and technical education programming . . . for students that aligns career guidance, twenty-first century career and technical education and academic curricula, and work-based learning opportunities that empower students to be successful learners and practitioners."[117]

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109 Iowa Code §256.111(5)(c).
110 Iowa Code §256.121(2)(a)(1) - (4).
111 Perkins V, Iowa Department of Education, educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/cte/perkins-v (last visited June 29, 2026).
112 Iowa Code §256.136(1)(a).
113 Iowa Code §256.136(1)(b).
114 Iowa Code §256.136(1)(c).
115 Iowa Code §256.136(1)(d).
116 Iowa Code §256.136(1)(e).
117 Iowa Code §256.136(3)(c).

- "[Review] career and technical education programs of school districts within the region based on standards adopted by the state board, and [recommend] to the department career and technical education programs for approval."[118]

2. Board of Educational Examiners

The Board of Educational Examiners consists of 13 members. Four of the 13 members are members of the general public who have demonstrated an interest in education but have never held a practitioner's license. Two of these four members must be the parent or guardian of a student enrolled in an elementary or secondary school. One of these four members must have been, or must currently be, a member of the board of directors of a school district.[119]

Meanwhile, 8 of the 13 members must be licensed practitioners. Three of these eight members must be administrators. One of these eight members must be an employee of a private school. The remaining four of these eight members must be selected from certain areas and specialties of the teaching profession, including elementary teachers, secondary teachers, special education teachers, counselors, and school service personnel.[120]

Finally, the 13th member of the Board of Educational Examiners is the Director of the Department of Education, or the Director's designee.[121] The members of the Board of Educational Examiners, apart from the Director or the Director's designee, are appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate.[122]

The main duty of the Board of Educational Examiners is to license teachers, administrators, and other individuals who provide educational assistance to children.[123] The Board of Educational Examiners develops a code of professional rights and responsibilities, practices, and ethics for the individuals it licenses.[124] Additionally, the Board of Educational Examiners is responsible for investigating certain incidents involving licensees,[125] conducting hearings, and, when appropriate, disciplining licensees, which may include revoking or suspending their licenses.[126] The various licensing fees that the Board of Educational Examiners collects are appropriated to the Board to fund the Board's operations.[127]

3. College Student Aid Commission

The College Student Aid Commission consists of 15 members, only 8 of whom are voting members. Seven of the eight voting members are appointed by the Governor. The Iowa Code sets out requirements for three of those seven voting members. At least one of the seven members must be enrolled at an institution of higher education;[128] at least one must be a parent of a student enrolled at an institution of higher education;[129] and at least one must have knowledge in financial or fiduciary matters.[130] The

118 Iowa Code §256.136(3)(d).
119 Iowa Code §256.147(1)(a).
120 Iowa Code §256.147(1)(b).
121 Iowa Code §256.147(1)(c).
122 Iowa Code §256.147(2).
123 Iowa Code §256.146(1)(a).
124 Iowa Code §256.146(1)(a)(5).
125 Iowa Code §256.146(25).
126 Iowa Code §256.146(13).
127 See Iowa Code §256.155(1).
128 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(d)(1).
129 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(d)(2).
130 Iowa Code §256.176(d)(3).

other one of the eight voting members is the Director of the Department of Education, or the Director's designee.[131]

There are seven ex officio, nonvoting members of the College Student Aid Commission, including:

- Two members of the Senate, one appointed by the President and one appointed by the Minority Leader.[132]
- Two members of the House of Representatives, one appointed by the Speaker and one appointed by the Minority Leader.[133]
- One member "of the [S]tate [B]oard of [R]egents to be named by the [S]tate [B]oard of [R]egents, or the [E]xecutive [D]irector of the [S]tate [B]oard of [R]egents if so appointed by the [S]tate [B]oard of [R]egents . . . ."[134]
- One member selected by an organization or association of the private colleges and universities in this State.[135]
- One member selected by an organization or association of Iowa community colleges.[136]

The College Student Aid Commission is focused on supporting students in pursuing educational opportunities beyond high school. The College Student Aid Commission is responsible for administering several scholarship, grant, and loan forgiveness programs. The five programs that received the highest amount of appropriations in the most recent education appropriations bill[137] are:

- The Iowa Tuition Grants Program, which provides grants to residents of Iowa who demonstrate financial need and are admitted to and attending, on either a full-time or part-time basis, an undergraduate program at one of Iowa's nonprofit colleges or universities.[138] The amount of the grant is tied to the average resident tuition and mandatory fee amounts at Iowa's state universities.[139] Grant recipients can receive tuition grants under the program for up to four years of full-time, undergraduate study. Part-time students are eligible for adjusted amounts.[140]
- The Future Ready Iowa Skilled Workforce Last-Dollar Scholarship Program, which is intended to cover any financial gap between federal and State grants and scholarships and the total amount of tuition and mandatory fees charged by an "eligible institution,"[141] which is defined as community colleges and the nonprofit colleges and universities in this State.[142] However, this program is more restricted in terms of who is eligible to receive an award. To receive an award, the student must be participating in an "eligible program," which means "a program of study or an academic major that is jointly approved by the [College Student Aid Commission] and the [Department of Workforce Development] . . . that leads to a credential aligned with a high-demand job" included on a list created and updated by the Department of Workforce Development and community colleges.[143] For purposes of this program,

131 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(b).
132 Iowa Code §256.176(c)(1).
133 Iowa Code §256.176(c)(2).
134 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(a)
135 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(e).
136 Iowa Code §256.176(2)(f).
137 See 2026 Iowa Acts, ch. 1196, §2.
138 Iowa Code §256.184.
139 Iowa Code §256.186(1).
140 Iowa Code §256.185.
141 Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship, Iowa Department of Education, educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/financial-aid/scholarships-grants/last-dollar (last visited June 29, 2026).
142 Iowa Code §256.228(1)(e).
143 Iowa Code §256.228(1)(f), (3).

"credential" means "a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree, conferring no more than an associate degree . . . ."[144] The amount of the scholarship award is based on community college tuition rates.[145]

- The Health Care Professional Incentive Program, which is designed to offer awards to recruit and retain individuals who are currently employed, or who will be employed, in an eligible health care profession in a geographic region in this State that has a shortage of health care professionals.[146] Whether a given profession is an "eligible health care profession" is determined by the Department of Health and Human Services, and may include "physicians, physician associates, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, nurse educators, and mental health professionals."[147] Under the program, the health care professional and the College Student Aid Commission enter into a program agreement that sets out the dates the professional's employment obligation begins and ends as well as whether the professional prefers to receive either a loan repayment or an income bonus.[148] Once the College Student Aid Commission determines the health care professional is in compliance with the terms of the program agreement, the Commission pays the award annually.[149] Full-time employees receive 20 percent of the aggregate award amount after completion of their first year of the employment obligation, 15 percent of the aggregate award amount after completion of their second year of the employment obligation, and 35 percent of the aggregate award amount after completion of their third year of the employment obligation.[150] The College Student Aid Commission is responsible for periodically updating the aggregate award amount, but the aggregate award amount cannot exceed $200,000.[151]
- The National Guard Service Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships to members of the Iowa Army or Air National Guard who are enrolled as undergraduate students in a community college, one of Iowa's State universities, or a nonprofit college or university in this State.[152] In order to receive a scholarship under the program, the member of the Iowa Army or Air National Guard must complete initial active duty training and maintain satisfactory performance of duty upon return from initial active duty training, which includes attending annual training and at least 90 percent of scheduled drill dates.[153] The amount of the scholarship award is tied to the tuition rates at the State universities.[154]
- The Iowa Workforce Grant and Incentive Program, which provides grant funding to students who are enrolled in one of Iowa's State universities and who are participating in an eligible program. There are two types of eligible programs: a teacher preparation program that leads to a bachelor's degree or certain specified teaching licenses,[155] and a program of study or academic major that is jointly approved by the State Board of Regents and the Workforce Development Board.[156] In terms of award amounts, a full-time student is eligible to receive not more than $2,000 per semester[157] for

144 Iowa Code §256.228(1)(d).
145 Iowa Code §256.228(3)(a).
146 Iowa Code §256.222(2).
147 Iowa Code §256.222(1)(d).
148 Iowa Code §256.222(5)(c).
149 Iowa Code §256.222(6)(a).
150 Iowa Code §256.222(6)(a)(1)(a) - (c).
151 Iowa Code §256.222(6)(b).
152 Iowa Code §256.210(1).
153 Iowa Code §256.210(1)(b), (c).
154 Iowa Code §256.210(2).
155 Iowa Code §256.230(1)(c)(2).
156 Iowa Code §256.230(1)(c)(1).
157 Iowa Code §256.230(3)(b).

not more than four semesters.[158] In addition to those periodic award amounts, the College Student Aid Commission can also provide a one-time incentive payment of up to $2,000 to a student who received a grant under the program in the academic year in which the student completed the eligible program if the student accepts and begins employment in an aligned occupation within six months of the program's completion.[159] When making awards under the program, the College Student Aid Commission is required to give priority to applicants who received an award under the program in the prior academic year and applicants who have the least financial ability to pay.[160]

4. Community Colleges Bureau

The community colleges themselves are each governed by a board of directors;[161] however, the State Board of Education has the general responsibility to "[a]dopt and establish policies for programs and services of the department which relate to community colleges."[162]

The Director of the Department of Education is required to appoint a Bureau Chief of the Community Colleges Bureau.[163] The Bureau Chief is responsible for making arrangements between a community college and schools within the community college's region to allow high school students "to participate in career and technical education programs and advanced placement courses" at the community college.[164] The Bureau Chief is also responsible for "administer[ing], allocat[ing], and disburs[ing] federal or state funds made available to pay a portion of the cost of acquiring sites for and constructing" community college facilities.[165] The Bureau Chief is required to enter into contracts with school districts and private schools "to provide courses or programs of study in addition to or as part of the curriculum made available in the community college."[166] In addition, the Bureau Chief is required to change the boundaries of the community colleges when the boards of the community colleges fail to change those boundaries as required by law.[167] The Bureau Chief is also responsible for "[prescribing] a uniform system of accounting for community colleges,"[168] and proposing administrative rules to the State Board of Education to carry out the responsibilities in Iowa Code chapter 260C—the chapter governing community colleges.[169]

D. Division of Special Education

The Division of Special Education was created for the "promotion, direction, and supervision of education for children requiring special education . . . ."[170] There are three parties involved in the work of the special education system. First, the parents of the child who requires special education —they enroll the child in special education services and initiate reviews when they believe the child is not receiving adequate special education services.[171] Second, the school district itself or via an

158 Iowa Code §256.230(3)(a).
159 Iowa Code §256.230(6).
160 Iowa Code §256.230(5).
161 Iowa Code §260C.14.
162 Iowa Code §260C.4(1).
163 Iowa Code §260C.5.
164 Iowa Code §260C.5(8).
165 Iowa Code §260C.5(4).
166 Iowa Code §260C.5(7).
167 Iowa Code §260C.5(2).
168 Iowa Code §260C.5(9).
169 Iowa Code §260C.5(6).
170 Iowa Code §256B.1.
171 Iowa Code §256B.6.

area education agency, which operates the special education program.[172] Third, the Division of Special Education, which has the following duties and powers in the special education system:

- To "supervise the system of special education for children requiring special education."[173]
- "To prescribe courses of study, and curricula for special schools, special classes, and special instruction of children requiring special education . . . , and to prescribe minimum requirements for children requiring special education to be admitted to any such special schools, classes[,] or instruction."[174]
- "To investigate and study the needs, methods[,] and costs of special education . . . ."[175]
- "To provide for the employment and establish standards for the performance of special education support personnel required to assist in the identification of and educational programs for children requiring special education."[176]
- To establish "special education research and demonstration projects and models for special education program development."[177]
- "To establish a special education resource, materials[,] and training system for the purpose of developing specialized instructional materials and provide in-service training to [employees so that those employees can] provide educational services to children requiring special education."[178]
- To "oversee the operation of each area education agency to ensure the area education agency complies with all applicable federal and state laws related to special education."[179]
- To establish "data collection systems related to special education that meet federal and state legal requirements . . . ."[180]

V. Specific Duties of the Department of Education

A. Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Program

The Department of Education administers the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired program.[181] Any resident of the State who is 21 years of age or younger, and who is blind or visually impaired, is entitled to receive the services of the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired program.[182]

The Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired program coordinates with area education agencies and school districts on the provision of services to eligible students who demonstrate a need for the services.[183] Services are primarily provided to students through teachers of the visually impaired, and orientation and mobility specialists. These individuals travel to schools, homes, and other locations as needed to provide direct services to students, consult with educators and other education professionals, and provide support to families. More specifically, teachers of the visually impaired assess the student's visual functioning; provide direct instruction to students, including using

[172] Iowa Code §256B.4.
[173] Iowa Code §256B.3(1).
[174] Iowa Code §256B.3(5).
[175] Iowa Code §256B.3(10).
[176] Iowa Code §256B.3(11).
[177] Iowa Code §256B.3(12).
[178] Iowa Code §256B.3(13).
[179] Iowa Code §256B.3(16).
[180] Iowa Code §256B.3(21).
[181] Iowa Code §256.95(1).
[182] Iowa Code §256.96.
[183] Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, iesbvi.org (last visited June 30, 2026).

braille and assistive technology; and recommend classroom accommodations and different instructional strategies when the student's visual impairments are affecting their education. Meanwhile, orientation and mobility specialists assess the student's functional travel skills; provide direction instruction, including instruction in the areas of public transportation, community travel, and cane travel; and recommend environmental accommodations to assist the student.[184]

B. Iowa School for the Deaf

The Department of Education governs the Iowa School for the Deaf.[185] Any resident of the State who is 21 years of age or younger, and who has hearing loss which is too severe to acquire an education in the public schools, is eligible to attend the Iowa School for the Deaf.[186] The Iowa School for the Deaf is a language immersion program that provides individualized instruction through faculty who are specialized teachers of the deaf.[187] The Iowa School for the Deaf also works with speech-language pathologists to evaluate students and provide services, including services related to articulation, alternative communication devices, and receptive and expressive language development in American Sign Language and English.[188]

The Iowa School for the Deaf has a physical campus, located in Council Bluffs.[189] It offers both day and boarding options for students. Students have the option to live in dormitories on the campus. Houseparents, residential counselors, cooks, nurses, and other dorm staff can all interact with the students using sign language.[190] In addition, the school offers many extracurricular activities to the students, including various sports, student council, and yearbook.[191]

The Iowa Code prohibits the Department of Education from closing the Iowa School for the Deaf unless three requirements have been met. First, the Department of Management must have presented the General Assembly with a "comprehensive plan, program, and fiscal analysis of the existing circumstances and the circumstances which would prevail upon the proposed closing" and with "data which would support the contention that the closing will be more efficient and effective than continuation of the existing facility."[192] Second, the General Assembly must have "studied the plans, programs, and fiscal analysis" and "reviewed their impact on the programs."[193] Third, the General Assembly must have "enacted legislation authorizing the closing to take effect not sooner than two years after the enactment of the legislation."[194]

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184 Itinerant Educators & Mobility Specialists, Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, iesbvi.org/student-services/itinerant-educators-mobility-specialists (last visited June 30, 2026).

185 Iowa Code §256.95(2).

186 Iowa Code §256.97.

187 About Iowa School for the Deaf, Iowa School for the Deaf, iowaschoolforthedeaf.org/about-isd (last visited June 30, 2026).

188 Student Services, Iowa School for the Deaf, iowaschoolforthedeaf.org/student-services-2 (last visited June 30, 2026).

189 Visit the ISD Campus, Iowa School for the Deaf, iowaschoolforthedeaf.org/visit-campus (last visited June 30, 2026).

190 Dorm Living, Iowa School for the Deaf, iowaschoolforthedeaf.org/dorm-living (last visited June 30, 2026).

191 Activities & Clubs, Iowa School for the Deaf, iowaschoolforthedeaf.org/activities-clubs (last visited June 30, 2026).

192 Iowa Code §256.102(1).

193 Iowa Code §256.102(2).

194 Iowa Code §256.102(3).

C. Therapeutic Classroom Incentive Grant Program

The Therapeutic Classroom Incentive Grant Program provides competitive grants to school districts for the establishment of therapeutic classrooms.[195] A therapeutic classroom is a classroom that is designed to provide support for "any student whose emotional, social, or behavioral needs interfere with the student's ability to be successful in the student's current educational environment" until such time as the student "is able to successfully return to that educational environment . . . ."[196]

School districts are authorized to apply for grants under the program, and those school districts are allowed to collaborate and partner with other schools, area education agencies, nonprofit organizations, and institutions operating within the State's behavioral health service system, when establishing therapeutic classrooms.[197]

The Department of Education is required to develop a grant application as well as selection and evaluation criteria. The selection criteria must include a method for prioritizing school district grant applications. First priority goes to applications submitted by school districts that also submitted an application in the immediately preceding fiscal year. Second priority goes to school districts that are collaborating or partnering with other schools, area education agencies, nonprofit organizations, or institutions operating within the State's behavioral health service system. Third priority goes to applications submitted by school districts that are located in behavioral health districts and that are providing behavioral health services to children.[198]

Additionally, the Department of Education is required to distribute grant awards as equitably as possible among small, medium, and large school districts.[199]

D. Computer Science Professional Development Incentive Fund

The Computer Science Professional Development Incentive Fund was established to assist schools in meeting the General Assembly's goal that, by July 1, 2019, each high school offer at least one computer science course, each middle school offer instruction in exploratory computer science, and each elementary school offer instruction in the basics of computer science.[200] This grant program is designed to "establish a foundation for personal and professional success in a high-technology, knowledge-based" economy[201] and to "build the capacity of Iowa schools to provide high quality computer science instruction."[202]

There are two forms of funding under this grant program. A school can apply for funding for computer science professional development activities for teachers who are employed by the school, or for tuition reimbursement for teachers who are seeking professional licensing from the Board of Educational Examiners related to computer science.[203] A school may complete an application for either or both of these funding streams based on need.

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195 Iowa Code §256.25(1).
196 Iowa Code §256.25(7).
197 Iowa Code §256.25(2).
198 Iowa Code §256.25(3).
199 Iowa Code §256.25(3).
200 Iowa Code §284.6A(1)(b).
201 Iowa Code §284.6A(1)(a).
202 Computer Science Professional Development Incentive Fund, Iowa Department of Education, educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/standards/instruction/computer-science/professional-development-fund (last visited July 2, 2026).
203 Iowa Code §284.6A(2).

E. Charter Schools

The State Board of Education and the Department of Education, along with the University of Northern Iowa, are also involved in the State's charter school system. Charter schools are publicly funded schools that are exempt from many of the laws that apply to public schools. In exchange for that flexibility, charter schools are required to satisfy certain performance measures,[204] and if a charter school does not satisfy those performance measures, the charter school contract can be revoked and the charter school can be shut down.[205]

The State Board of Education and the University of Northern Iowa are responsible for approving or rejecting applications submitted by the groups that are eligible to form charter schools.[206] The State Board of Education, in consultation with the University of Northern Iowa, is required to adopt rules to establish timelines for this application.[207] Assuming the State Board of Education or the University of Northern Iowa approves the application submitted by the founding group, the founding group and the State Board or the University of Northern Iowa, as applicable, then enter into a contract that sets forth the academic and operational performance measures by which the charter school will be evaluated.[208] The initial term of this contract is five school budget years,[209] and the contract can be renewed.[210]

The State Board of Education, in consultation with the University of Northern Iowa, is required to adopt a performance framework for the charter schools to follow. The performance framework is required to clearly set forth the "academic and operational performance indicators, measures, and metrics that will guide the evaluation of the charter school . . . ."[211] Those indicators, measures, and metrics include: student academics,[212] attendance,[213] enrollment,[214] postsecondary readiness,[215] financial performance,[216] and governing board performance.[217]

The State Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the University of Northern Iowa monitor the performance and compliance of each approved charter school.[218] This includes collecting and analyzing data as well as conducting inquiries and investigations.[219] The State Board of Education, in consultation with the University of Northern Iowa, also develops and implements charter school contract revocation and nonrenewal standards and procedures.[220]

[204] Iowa Code §256E.9(1).
[205] Iowa Code §256E.10(10).
[206] Iowa Code §256E.1(4).
[207] Iowa Code §§256E.4(2), 256E.5(3).
[208] Iowa Code §256E.6(1).
[209] Iowa Code §256E.6(2).
[210] Iowa Code §256E.10(5).
[211] Iowa Code §256E.9(1).
[212] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(b).
[213] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(d).
[214] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(e).
[215] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(f).
[216] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(h).
[217] Iowa Code §256E.9(1)(i).
[218] Iowa Code §§256E.3, 256E.10(1).
[219] Iowa Code §256E.10(1).
[220] Iowa Code §256E.10(11).

F. Area Education Agencies

Area education agencies are entities that provide various kinds of services to schools within their geographic region, and to students enrolled in those schools. There are nine area education agencies in the State.[221]

One example of the services provided by area education agencies is educational services,[222] which generally include "[s]upport for curriculum development, instruction, and assessment services that address reading, language arts, math, and science."[223] Area education agencies also provide professional development services for teachers and other educators,[224] special education services, and media services, which include materials lending, the provision of audiovisual materials, and the production of various media-oriented instructional materials.[225]

Area education agencies are under the general supervision of the Director of the Department of Education. The Director is given the authority to change the boundaries of the area education agencies to take into account mergers of school districts.[226] In addition, the Director is responsible for approving the annual budgets of each area education agency.[227]

In terms of accreditation, the State Board of Education is responsible for developing the standards and rules for the accreditation of area education agencies.[228] The Director of the Department of Education appoints an accreditation team,[229] and the accreditation team evaluates the area education agency and then recommends to the Director and the State Board of Education whether the area education agency should receive initial accreditation or remain accredited.[230] The State Board of Education determines whether the area education agency receives initial accreditation or remains accredited.[231]

If the State Board of Education determines that an area education agency does not meet the accreditation standards, then the Director of the Department of Education is required to establish a remediation plan, subject to the approval of the State Board.[232] Once the remediation plan is approved by the State Board of Education, the accreditation team again evaluates the area education agency and sends a report and a recommendation to the Director and the State Board related to whether the area education agency has corrected whatever deficiencies existed.[233] If the deficiencies in the area education agency's programs are still not corrected, the Director is required to either merge the deficient program with a program from another accredited area education agency, or contract with another area education agency or public educational institution for purposes of the program.[234]

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221 Iowa Code §273.2(1).
222 Iowa Code §273.2(3)(a).
223 Learn More About Iowa's Area Education Agencies, Iowa's Area Education Agencies, iowaaea.org/about (last visited June 30, 2026).
224 Iowa Code §273.2(3)(b).
225 Iowa Code §273.2(4); Learn More About Iowa's Area Education Agencies, Iowa's Area Education Agencies, iowaaea.org/about (last visited June 30, 2026).
226 Iowa Code §273.2(1).
227 Iowa Code §273.3(12).
228 Iowa Code §273.11(1).
229 Iowa Code §273.10(1)(b).
230 Iowa Code §273.10(2).
231 Iowa Code §273.10(3).
232 Iowa Code §273.10(4).
233 Iowa Code §273.10(5).
234 Iowa Code §273.10(6).

VI. The Department of Education's Role in Prekindergarten Through Grade 12 Education

A. Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program is designed to "provide an opportunity for all young children in the state to enter school ready to learn by expanding voluntary access to quality preschool curricula."[235] Children who are residents of Iowa, and who are either "four years of age on or before September 15 of a school year" or who reach "five years of age on or after March 15 but on or before September 15 of the calendar year during which the school year begins" are eligible to enroll in this preschool program,[236] including the following:

The Department of Education interacts with the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program in a few different ways. First, the State Board of Education is responsible for adopting rules to further define several different requirements that are used to determine whether a given program operated by a school district or a community-based provider is approved to participate in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, including the following:[237]

- Requirements related to maximum and minimum teacher-to-child ratios.[238] Currently, at least "one staff member and one teacher" must be "present when 11 to 20 children are present."[239]
- Maximum class size requirements.[240] The current maximum class size is "no more than 20 children per classroom."[241]
- Requirements related to student learning standards.[242]
- Requirements related to "[p]rovisions for the integration of children who are participating in other state and federally funded preschools."[243]
- Requirements related to "collaboration with participating families, early care providers, and community partners."[244] Such collaboration is designed to lead to the provision of quality early learning experiences; extended day child care; transportation; developmental screening, including health, hearing, and vision screening; referral to other agencies for supports; and family education and support.[245]
- Requirements related to minimum amounts of instruction per week. A minimum of 10 hours per week of instruction is required.[246]
- Requirements related to parental involvement in the program.[247] This must include "at least one home visit by the licensed teacher of the child, one family night, and at least two family-teacher conferences

[235] Iowa Code §256C.2(1).
[236] Iowa Code §256C.3(1)(a).
[237] Iowa Code §256C.3(3).
[238] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(a).
[239] Iowa Admin. Code 281-16.2(2).
[240] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(a).
[241] Iowa Admin. Code 281-16.2(3).
[242] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(c).
[243] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(d).
[244] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(e).
[245] Iowa Admin. Code 281-16.2(14).
[246] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(f).
[247] Iowa Code §256C.3(3)(g).

per year." In addition, family involvement may include "volunteering in the classroom, orientation to the preschool program, parent education, general communications, or other activities."[248]

Second, the State Board of Education is also responsible for adopting rules to further define several requirements of school districts and community-based providers that are implementing the preschool program, including identifying "[m]ethods of demonstrating community readiness to implement high-quality instruction[,]"[249] participating in "data collection and performance measurement processes and reporting[,]"[250] and addressing professional development for preschool teachers.[251]

Third, the Department of Education also interacts with the preschool program by implementing an application and selection process for school district and community-based provider participation in the preschool program, tracking student performance in the preschool program and the performance of those same students later in elementary and secondary education, and establishing procedures to monitor the quality of the programming provided under the preschool program.[252]

B. Accreditation

The State Board of Education is responsible for accrediting all public schools in this State that offer instruction to students in prekindergarten through grade 12. All of these schools are required to follow an educational program adopted by the State Board of Education.[253] The most prominent part of that educational program is the curriculum implemented in the school.

Grades one through six are required to include instruction in: English-language arts, social studies, math, science, health, physical education, traffic safety, music, visual art, and human growth and development. In addition, career planning and pathways instruction is required in grades five and six. This includes career investigation and career connections. Also, in at least one grade from grades one through six, schools are required to offer instruction related to computer science.[254] The required instruction in grades seven and eight is similar to the required instruction in grades one through six. However, in grades seven and eight, there is more focus placed on career instruction.[255]

In grades 9 through 12, schools must offer and teach all of the following to gain accreditation or to remain accredited:

- Five units of science.[256] (The rules adopted by the State Board of Education define a "unit" as a course that is taught for at least 200 minutes per week for 36 weeks, or the equivalent of 120 hours of instruction.[257])
- Five units of social studies.[258]
- Six units of English-language arts.[259]
- Four units of a sequential program in mathematics.[260]

[248] Iowa Admin. Code 281-16.2(12).
[249] Iowa Code §256C.3(4)(a), (5)(a).
[250] Iowa Code §256C.3(4)(c), (5)(b).
[251] Iowa Code §256C.3(4)(d), (5)(c).
[252] Iowa Code §256C.3(6)(a) - (c).
[253] Iowa Code §256.11.
[254] Iowa Code §256.11(3).
[255] Iowa Code §256.11(4).
[256] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(a).
[257] Iowa Admin. Code 281-12.5(13).
[258] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(b).
[259] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(c).
[260] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(d).

- Two additional units of mathematics, which may include instruction related to agriculture or applied sciences, technology, engineering, or manufacturing.[261]
- Two sequential units of one world language.[262]
- At least one-eighth unit of physical education activities during each semester.[263]
- At least three sequential units in at least four career and technical education service areas, which include: (1) agriculture; (2) information systems; (3) applied sciences; (4) health sciences; (5) human services; and (6) business.[264]
- Two units of fine arts.[265]
- One unit of health education.[266]
- One-half unit of personal finance literacy.[267]
- One-half unit of computer science.[268]

However, there is more to the educational program than just the curriculum. In order to be accredited by the Department of Education, a school is also required to provide programs that meet the needs of students requiring special education, gifted and talented students, and at-risk students.[269] Schools must employ either a qualified teacher librarian who is licensed by the Board of Educational Examiners or a person who was previously employed as a librarian by a public library.[270] Additionally, each school is required to establish a kindergarten through grade 12 library program in accordance with standards adopted by the State Board of Education.[271]

Schools must employ a qualified guidance counselor who is licensed by the Board of Educational Examiners. In fact, schools are directed to work toward the goal of having one qualified guidance counselor for every 350 students enrolled in the school district. The State Board of Education is required to establish standards for the guidance and counseling program.[272] Schools are also required to have a school nurse to provide health services to students. The goal is for each school district to have one school nurse for every 750 students enrolled in the school district.[273]

The Iowa Code establishes a two-phase monitoring process the State Board of Education utilizes when determining whether schools should remain accredited. Phase I consists of annual monitoring by the Department of Education for compliance with State and federal school laws.[274] This can include desk audits, remote or on-site visits, a review of school finances, and a review of the school board's policies and procedures.[275] The purpose of phase I monitoring is to bring schools into compliance with federal and State laws, rules, and regulations.[276] Phase II monitoring only takes place upon the occurrence of

[261] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(e).
[262] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(f).
[263] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(g).
[264] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(h).
[265] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(i).
[266] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(j).
[267] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(k).
[268] Iowa Code §256.11(5)(l).
[269] Iowa Code §256.11(7).
[270] Iowa Code §256.11(9)(a)(1).
[271] Iowa Code §256.11(9)(a)(2).
[272] Iowa Code §256.11(9A).
[273] Iowa Code §256.11(9B).
[274] Iowa Code §256.11(10)(a)(1).
[275] Iowa Code §256.11(10)(a)(2)(a) - (d).
[276] Iowa Code §256.11(10)(a)(3).

certain events, including: when phase I monitoring indicates that the school is not in compliance with a federal or State law, rule, or regulation; in response to a petition requesting an accreditation committee visitation filed with the Director of the Department of Education by a certain number of eligible electors residing in the school district; in response to a petition requesting an accreditation committee visitation filed with the Director of the Department of Education by a certain number of parents or guardians who have children enrolled in the school; or at the direction of the State Board of Education.[277] Phase II monitoring consists of a full desk audit of all monitoring requirements and an on-site visit to the school by an accreditation committee.[278] After visiting the school, the accreditation committee is required to determine whether the school has satisfied the accreditation standards and report to the Director of the Department of Education with a recommendation.[279]

If the monitoring reveals an area of noncompliance, and the school fails to remedy that noncompliance, the Director of the Department of Education is authorized to take certain actions and is required to take other actions. The Director is authorized to:

> [a]dvise the [school of] the availability of appropriate technical assistance options[;] [r]equire [the school] to complete a corrective action plan or plan for improvement by a reasonable deadline[;] [r]ecommend a phase II visit to the [school] to the state board [of education;] [r]efer conduct of [school] staff or school board members, or school authorities, to the office of the attorney general for investigation[;] [r]efer financial concerns to the auditor of state for investigation[;] [r]ecommend removal of accreditation of the [school] to the state board [of education; or] [t]ake any other enforcement mechanism available to the director.[280]

Meanwhile, if the area of noncompliance relates to certain federal or State education laws, the Director of the Department of Education is required to recommend that the State Board of Education do one of the following: "[i]mpose conditions on funding provided to a school[, or] [w]ithhold payment of state or federal funds . . . until the noncompliance is corrected . . . ."[281] The State Board is required to take one of those actions.[282]

In terms of the actions the Director of the Department of Education is authorized to take, if the Director recommends that the State Board of Education remove a school's accreditation, a process is initiated that involves the accreditation committee providing a report to the school detailing the areas of noncompliance and actions the school must take to remedy those areas, hearings before the State Board, additional site visits, and additional opportunities to remedy the areas of noncompliance. If the school still fails to remedy the areas of noncompliance, then the State Board of Education is required to remove the school's accreditation.[283] In the case of a school district, that means the State Board of Education merges the territory of the school district with one or more contiguous school districts, effective at the end of the school year. The State Board of Education is authorized to place the school district under a receivership for the time period between the date of the State Board's decision and the end of the school year.[284]

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277 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(b)(1)(a) - (c).
278 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(b)(2).
279 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(b)(4).
280 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(c)(3)(a) - (g).
281 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(c)(2)(a) - (b).
282 Iowa Code §256.11(10)(c)(2).
283 Iowa Code §256.11(11).
284 Iowa Code §256.11(11)(e).

When it comes to accreditation, nonpublic schools are treated differently than school districts. A nonpublic school can apply for accreditation from the State Board of Education in the same manner as a public school, in which case the nonpublic school is required to satisfy all of the requirements related to the educational program. Alternatively, the Iowa Code authorizes nonpublic schools to pursue accreditation from an independent accrediting agency that is on a list of approved independent accrediting agencies developed by the State Board of Education. This list is required to contain at least "six regional or national nonprofit, nongovernmental agencies recognized as reliable authorities concerning the quality of education offered by a school."[285] There are currently 12 independent accrediting agencies on this list.[286] Nonpublic schools that participate in the accreditation process offered by one of those 12 independent accrediting agencies are deemed to meet all of the educational standards discussed above.[287]

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[285] Iowa Code §256.11(16)(a).

[286] Nonpublic School Accreditation, Iowa Department of Education, educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/accreditation-program-approval/nonpublic-school-accreditation (last visited July 2, 2026).

[287] Iowa Code §256.11(16)(b).