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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
JASON E. GLASS, DIRECTOR

May 27, 2011

Dr. Tim Taylor, Superintendent
Ames Community School District
415 Stanton Avenue
Ames, Iowa 50014

Dear Superintendent Taylor

Attached is the report of findings for the Comprehensive School Improvement Site Visit conducted at Ames Community School District (CSD) on March 29, 30, and 31, 2011. The report is based upon a variety of interviews conducted with district staff and stakeholder groups during the indicated dates, and review of documents submitted to the Department and on-site.

The site visit was designed to assess the district's progress with its Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), provide a general assessment of educational practices within the district, make recommendations for improvement, and determine compliance with state accreditation standards and applicable federal program requirements.

Based on the findings from the comprehensive site visit, Ames CSD maintains State of Iowa accreditation; however, non-compliance issues were identified. These issues are included in the Chapter 12 Non-compliance Matrix and the Outside of Chapter 12 Non-compliance Matrix contained in the site visit report. The district must resolve the identified issues through completion of corrective actions according to agreed upon timelines. Department follow-up will be conducted to verify resolution of the identified non-compliance issues.

The report reflects consensus of the following team members:

Department of Education Representatives:

Donna Christensen, Special Education Cadre
Tom Deeter, Assessment Consultant
Jim Doyle, Special Education Cadre
Dee Gethmann, Early Childhood Consultant
Mary Beth Schroeder-Fracek, Administrative Consultant
Margaret Jensen Connet, School Improvement Consultant, Equity
Penny Milburn, Early Childhood Consultant
Julie Melcher, School Improvement Consultant
Gary Schwartz, School Construction Consultant
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Roger Utman, Director, Division of Community Colleges
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Area Education Agency Representatives:

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Helping Communities Meet the Learning Needs of All Their Children and Adults

Local Education Agency Representatives:

Jim Casey, Human Resources Director, Johnston CSD
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Kevin Schulte, High School Assistant Principal, Saydel CSD
Laura Sivadge, Elementary Curriculum Director, Norwalk CSD
Dennis Wulf, Superintendent, Norwalk CSD

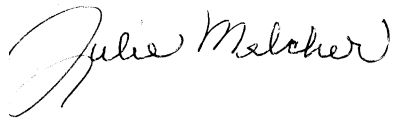
It is our hope this report will provide guidance to enhance student achievement in the district and support continuing conversations among staff and community members about the local education system, how and what students are learning, and how *more* students can learn at higher levels.

As part of Ames CSD's continuous improvement process, the district must review its current CSIP and provide revisions as needed. Revisions should be based on the district's needs assessments (including the attached report), student achievement data, stakeholder input, and established priorities. Recertification of the CSIP must be completed by September 15th, 2011. Directions for revision and submission of the CSIP can be found at: <https://www.edinfo.state.ia.us/securelogin.asp>.

The Department would appreciate the district's feedback regarding its site visit experience. This feedback will inform the Department's efforts to continuously improve the comprehensive site visit process. A short online survey has been developed and is available at the following site: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W58H5LZ>. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Responses are confidential and shared in aggregate form with members of the Department's School Improvement Team.

The visiting team again extends its gratitude to you and the Ames CSD staff and patrons in preparing for and showing courtesy during the visit. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,



Julie Melcher
School Improvement Consultant
Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services
Iowa Department of Education



Del Hoover, Deputy Administrator
Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services
Iowa Department of Education

cc: Site Visit Team Members
School Board President
Iowa Department of Education Official File
AEA Office

Comprehensive Site Visit Iowa Department of Education



Ames Community School District

Team Findings

March 29, 30, and 31, 2011

Iowa Department of Education
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Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

Vision, Mission, and Goals

In an improving district/school, the vision, mission, and goals are clearly communicated in the school and community. Stakeholders understand and share a commitment to the district/school expectations, goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The vision guides allocations of time and resources. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Clearly articulated mission is established collaboratively with stakeholder groups representing the diversity of the community.
- Vision, mission, and goals are communicated throughout the system and community.
- The vision and mission of the district/school guide teaching and learning.
- Every five years, the comprehensive needs assessment process, with input from stakeholders, is used to review and revise the beliefs, mission, and/or vision; major educational needs; and student learning goals.
- Academic and academic-related data are analyzed and used to determine prioritized goals.
- Goals guide assessment of student achievement, district/school effectiveness, and the allocation of time and resources.
- The vision, mission, and goals support values of respecting and valuing diversity.

Noted Strengths:

1. School board members described their commitment to maintaining focus on the district's vision and mission. For example, the district's mission is placed on each board meeting agenda and shared at the beginning of each meeting. The board is now developing an educational philosophy emerging from the vision and mission through the efforts of the superintendent, district administrators, and building principals. The board plans to approve it as a policy in the near future. School board members reported receiving a monthly personalized district progress report at board meetings providing ongoing information about student achievement. School board members also reported the use of DuFour's four consistent questions guiding the work of the district:

- What do we want all students to learn?
- How will we know they have learned it?
- What will we do when they have learned it?
- What will we do if they don't?

Recommendations for Improvement:

2. The superintendent, administrators, and school board members reported the district has established a mission statement: "The mission of the Ames Community Schools is to ensure that all learners develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and personal esteem necessary to grow in and shape a changing society." The mission is accompanied by the district's vision statement: "The Ames CSD will meet the needs of all students to ensure they are lifelong learners who are citizenship, college, and career-ready." The accreditation site visit team received limited evidence through interviews that the district mission and vision are known, understood, or embraced by all district stakeholders. District administrators, staff, School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) members, students, parents, and school board members are encouraged to do the following:

- Further define the mission within each stakeholder group by engaging people in on-going conversations. For example, what does the mission mean to building administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, SIAC, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Building Leadership Teams, and school board members? What assumptions do people hold? What are the non-negotiables? Examine underlying assumptions about the district's mission within each stakeholder group.
- Use the mission as the foundation for district and attendance center decision-making.
- Use the mission to leverage further change to positively impact student achievement.
- Plan for consistently communicating the mission through the use of a communication plan.

Commitment to, and promotion of, the academic, emotional, physical, and social development of each and every student to become lifelong learners who are citizenship, college, and career-ready is essential to achieve the district's mission. Stakeholders must commit to this without reservations.

Leadership

In an improving district/school, leaders communicate a shared sense of purpose and understanding of the district/school's values. Leaders have a visible presence, provide resources and ensure two-way communication between the educational system and stakeholders. Leaders provide encouragement, recognition, and support for improving student learning and staff performance. Leadership is committed, persistent, proactive, and distributed throughout the system. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Policies and procedures are established to effectively support district/school operations.
- The school board and district/school administrators implement an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel.
- Policies and practices are implemented to reduce and eliminate discrimination and harassment and to reflect, respect, and celebrate diversity.
- The role and responsibility of administrative leaders is supported, respected, and understood.
- A clearly defined system and expectations are established for the collection, analysis, and use of data regarding student achievement and progress with the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP).
- The capacity of staff, students, and parents to contribute and lead is built and supported.
- Opportunities for participation are provided for input, feedback, and ownership for student and system success among staff, students, parents, and community.
- Equity in access to learning opportunities and compliance with local, state, and federal legislation is ensured.
- Leaders at all levels understand and manage the change process.

Noted Strengths:

3. The school board convened a group of community members to assist in providing input into recent and anticipated budget cuts. The Budget Advisory Committee consisted of about thirty people who applied to serve. Five scheduled meetings were held. Based on the work of this committee, district expenditures for programs, initiatives, and operations were identified. Costs and priorities were determined. This was followed by a series of public forums in which board members and the Budget Advisory Committee were interactive with the community in listening to concerns, answering questions, asking questions, and considering public input. The school board expressed commitment to transparent communication with the public.
4. Multiple interview groups reported commitment from the superintendent and school board to solicit and use input from administrators and the public in making district budget decisions. School board members and administrators created a list of district programs, initiatives, and operational expenditures; attached costs; and prioritized the list. Through public forums, board members, superintendent, and other district administrators have provided information and sought community input regarding budget cuts, should further reductions need to be made. School board members have actively engaged in conversations at public forum gatherings to draw out ideas, concerns, and contribute to the public's understanding of the implications of budget reductions. Community conversations are assisting board members in understanding community members' wishes.

5. Teachers and building level administrators reported multiple leadership opportunities exist for teachers, such as serving on the Quality Instruction Leadership Team (QILT), building leadership teams, and committees such as the district's technology committee; leading professional development; and organizing a book club. Teachers and administrators reported teacher leaders are developed internally and have been well-received.
6. The Ames CSD is commended for the extent of collaboration to provide preschool programming through the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for Four-Year-Old Children and the integration of children receiving early childhood special education services. In addition to the preschools located in the district's early childhood building, Ames CSD established partnerships with four community-based preschool programs in order to provide SWVPP in various locations throughout the community. The program administrator has provided leadership in establishing and maintaining collaboration among the partners and provided professional learning opportunities for the preschool teachers. The partnership has contributed to improved quality in curriculum, assessment, and instruction, as well as increased access to family support services.
7. High school students reported a variety of opportunities to take on leadership roles in activities, clubs, and district committees. For example, students are supported to initiate clubs with teacher support/sponsorship. Examples included the following:
 - Spectrum
 - Student Council
 - Junior and senior senate
 - Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD)
 - Homecoming committee
 - District technology committee
 - SIAC

Recommendations for Improvement:

8. Parents expressed their support and satisfaction with changes in the district's administrative team. School board members reported trust in the superintendent, as well as district administrators. The board stated current leadership is actively engaged in creating a collaborative, respectful culture and focusing importance on the role of building administrators as instructional leaders. This is being accomplished through a team approach to teaching and learning. Parents, however, reported concern regarding the district's ongoing focus on finances and facilities that dominate conversations and overshadow focus on student achievement. Some teachers and parents voiced concerns about the school board's lack of trust in recommendations made by district leadership. For example, one interviewee stated, "It would be nice if the school board would listen to the instructional leaders and their recommendations. It's about more than finance and facilities." This was noted as an area of improvement in the district's last accreditation site visit report (2006). The school board and district leadership are encouraged to review the district's last accreditation site visit report (recommendations #25 and #26) regarding this issue. For example, engage the assistance of a professional education organization to further develop the current board's commitment to a trusting working relationship with district leadership, as well as using data to make informed, unbiased decisions. Part of that development process includes the board's full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of board members and of district administrators. This will require consensus and commitment to an open, bias-

free decision-making process that invites, respects, and upholds the authority of the board and the authority of district leaders.

9. Central office administrators reported the evaluation of central office and building administrators was incomplete last school year due to turnover in administration. (See non-compliance matrix.) In addition, there is no identified administrative mentoring and induction program available to new administrators. The district is encouraged to consider the following:
- Ensure all district administrators are evaluated annually through an established timeline.
 - Ensure the use of the established administrator evaluation procedures and instruments.
 - Establish and implement a mentoring and induction program for new administrators, at minimum.

Consider contacting School Administrators of Iowa (SAI, <http://www.sai-iowa.org/>) for assistance and resources.

10. Document review indicated the superintendent is the district's equity coordinator; however, interviews revealed limited knowledge of this. The role and function of the equity coordinator was unclear to stakeholders. The responsibilities of the equity coordinator need to be clearly delineated through the job description and communicated to staff, students, parents, and the community. A district equity coordinator can be proactive in a number of areas, including the following:
- Annually monitor the district's website and annual publications to ensure they include accurate information about the district's non-discrimination and anti-bullying and harassment policies, the identity and contact information for the equity coordinator, and information about the civil rights-related grievance procedure.
 - Communicate annually to parents, students, and staff about their rights and responsibilities related to non-discrimination and harassment policies.
 - Monitor student course enrollment and achievement trends by racial/ethnic background, gender, and disability, and facilitate periodic conversations with administrators and staff regarding those trends.
 - Make an annual equity report with recommendations to the school board.
 - Facilitate periodic conversations with students and staff on ways the district might respect, reflect, and celebrate diversity. This was noted as an area in need of improvement in the district's 2006 site visit report.
 - Plan periodic professional development for staff on diversity and equity-related issues.

Additionally, the superintendent serving as the district's equity coordinator has the potential to place the superintendent and complainants in an awkward position. For example, if a community patron perceives an equity issue within the district, the equity coordinator would be required to investigate and make a determination if the situation is founded. In addition, the equity coordinator will decide what action or actions would need to be taken to rectify the situation. If the community patron does not agree with the decision of the equity coordinator, they should be able to appeal his/her decision to another level within the organization. Normally, appeals are addressed by the superintendent. With the dual duties of the superintendent as equity coordinator, the patron may perceive the district does not allow for appropriate channels for such an appeal.

Consider accessing resources regarding equity on the Iowa Department of Education web site at:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=485&Itemid=1213.

Collaborative Relationships

In an improving district/school, stakeholders understand and support the mission and goals of the district/school and have meaningful roles in the decision-making process. Collaboration results from a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership among stakeholders from diverse community groups. Educators in the system develop and nurture a professional culture and collaborative relationships marked by mutual respect and trust inside and outside of the organization. The system works together with balance between district direction and school autonomy. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Instructional staff is provided opportunities for interaction to focus on professional issues.
- Instructional staff constructively analyzes and critiques practices and procedures including content, instruction, and assessment.
- Instructional staff follows established procedures to resolve professional conflicts, solve problems, share information about students, and communicate student information to parents.
- Processes and procedures that invite and respect stakeholder input, support, and interaction are implemented by the district/school.
- Parents are involved as partners in the educational process.
- Positive alliances among school staff, students, parents, and diverse community groups are created and nurtured.

Noted Strengths:

11. School board members reported many examples of positive collaborative relationships among the district, city, and community. Examples included, but were not limited to, the following:
 - Partnerships with the city regarding playground equipment, swimming facilities, city parks and ball diamond
 - Rate structure in place for use of district facilities by community non-profit and for-profit organizations (i.e., the district charging to cover cost of heat, light, and water with the renter providing someone to supervise)
 - City youth program for all district students
 - Partnership with city for Iowa Games
 - Regular schedule of meetings between district superintendent and board president with mayor and city manager
 - Mileage Club through Mary Greeley Hospital at each elementary school
 - Iowa State University (ISU) Greek community volunteers read in all 1st and 2nd grade classrooms and provide a book for each student
 - Foster grandparents
 - Kiwanis coordination of Key Club at high school
 - Campaigns for local non-profit groups developed by marketing students
12. The district was reported by some interviewees to be proactive in sharing information regarding district finances, as well as other district news. For example, the district places its annual progress report (APR), as well as all school board documents, on the district web site. The district has established a productive relationship with the **Ames Tribune** and **Ames News Online**. These news venues regularly report district information. The superintendent and other district representatives participate in weekly radio shows for the purpose of sharing district news. District school board meetings are televised through Mediacom.

13. The preschool program has established a variety of strategies to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with the families of preschool children. Families expressed satisfaction and appreciation with the programs, administration, and teaching staff. Evidence of parental involvement was apparent through multiple modes including home visits; parent-teacher conferences; display of a “Family Board” in the classroom; and on-going, two-way communication between the families and teaching staff.

Recommendations for Improvement:

14. School board members and district level administrators reported persistent efforts to communicate information to the public. While there is reliance on technology to communicate with the public, school board members reported their awareness of a significant number of the public who do not have easy access to the Internet. School board members, superintendent, and administrators are encouraged to develop a communication plan that is flexible and sensitive to the communication needs of the public. For example, develop a plan that incorporates attention to the following:

- What specific information needs to be communicated? (topic and content)
- With whom does the specific information need to be communicated? (specific group)
- By when does the specific information need to be communicated? (timeline)
- Through what means would this specific information best be communicated with this specific group of people? (multiple venues, e.g., e-mail, hardcopy, district web site and newsletter, local newspaper, radio, television, notes home etc.)

Consistent use of a communication plan by the board, superintendent, administrators, school committees, student groups, and others can improve communication with district stakeholders and improve relationships. Taking time to carefully consider the above elements of a communication plan can assist the district in being intentional in its communications and ensure consistent messages are disseminated.

Learning Environment

In an improving district/school, the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning. The environment is safe, orderly, purposeful, and free from threat of physical, social, and emotional harm. Teachers are familiar with students' cultures and know how to work effectively in a multi-cultural setting. Students are guided to think critically about learning and have opportunities to apply learning to real world situations. Classrooms are integrated with diverse learners (i.e., gender, race, special needs, at-risk, gifted). Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Rules and procedures for behavior and consequences are clearly communicated and consistently administered.
- School facilities are physically accessible and school routines enhance student learning.
- Materials, resources, technology, programs, and activities reflecting diversity are available to all students.
- The district/school provides a clean, inviting, welcoming environment.
- A clearly understood crisis management plan is established, communicated, and implemented when necessary.
- Teaching and learning are protected from external disturbances and internal distractions.
- The district/school reflects the contributions and perspectives of diverse groups and preserves the cultural dignity of staff, students, and parents.

Noted Strengths:

15. School board members noted the efforts of district principals in creating positive learning environments. For example, the high school principal is focusing on reducing tardies, making visits to students' homes for the purpose of keeping students in school, and implementing positive discipline approaches. The principal makes "good morning" announcements and holds pep rallies to increase school spirit among staff and students. The high school recently received a \$1,000 donation to support pep busses. The high school also implements Advisory as an approach to creating positive relationships among students and staff. At the elementary level, Responsive Classrooms is being implemented to create a supportive, accepting community in classrooms. Restorative practices (restitution) are being implemented at the middle school level.
16. Students and parents reported the district's schools are generally safe. Students reported there are cameras at the high school and teachers and administrators are present in hallways during passing times. Multiple interview groups stated incidents of bullying and harassment are dealt with swiftly and according to established procedures. Students reported they feel comfortable talking to counselors, teachers, and principals. Parents reported while they may not know with whom to speak according to policy, they can call the principal to share their concerns about student safety.

Recommendations for Improvement:

17. Parents reported the district does not have a facility plan to address the aging elementary buildings and technology infrastructure. The technology available for use by teachers and students is inconsistent across all buildings. It is recommended the district continue its efforts to develop a plan for facilities, as well as a communication plan to ensure parents and community members are informed. For example, an element of the facilities plan might include how the district will ensure equitable access to technology infrastructure, hardware, and software. In addition, the district is encouraged to review the allocation of technology resources available to the buildings and ensure increased equity in the disbursement of

technology resources. For example, high school teachers and students voiced frustration about the access and functionality of computers. High school and middle school students reported difficulties with network connections and bandwidth. The technology committee is encouraged to consider reevaluating how to allocate current and future resources.

18. While multiple interview groups reported a safe environment, elementary teachers and principals reported some incidents of bullying and harassment. It is recommended the bullying and harassment policies be reviewed with staff, students, and parents. In addition, consider a careful review of current building behavior referral data. When patterns of bullying and/or harassment behavior appear, intentionally and clearly communicate information regarding resources and steps parents can take to talk with their children about bullying and harassment. Inform all staff, students, and parents of specific incident data to encourage dialogue with factual information and ensure protocols are in place to secure future data collection reflects needed information about any incidents that occur. Building administrators are encouraged to conscientiously record and report bullying, harassment, and all discipline behavior. Without consistent data, schools are expending time and effort dealing with assumptions, while missing opportunities to appropriately address issues in a focused way. Clarify behavioral definitions and develop a protocol defining how specific behaviors are to be coded into the system. For example, use Infinite Campus to record, report, and study student behavior data to determine the type of misbehavior, the extent of misbehavior, and the locations and times of day when misbehaviors occur. Access resources that can be helpful to schools and parents at the following link on the Iowa Department of Education web site: http://iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=927&:school-safety&catid=666&:highlights&Itemid=1. Also consider contacting the district's Partnership Director at Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance for learning about resources and training, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and/or Olweus.
19. Various interviews revealed subtle cultural biases that may negatively impact the learning environment. For example, there were references to "the Chicago kids," and designated wings for special education and the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) at the high school. Some interviewees reported examples such as, "The Chicago kids speak differently than other students and teaching staff have difficulty in adjusting to cultural differences." This challenges the capacity of staff in responding to cultural differences. This challenge, in addition to the rich cultural diversity the university brings, intensifies the need for training in cultural competence for administrators and teachers. The district is encouraged to explore community resources, as well as those available through Heartland AEA. Diversity and cultural competence were noted areas for improvement in the district's last accreditation site visit report, 2006. While there has been turnover in administration, school board, and teachers, the issue regarding diversity and cultural competence remains. This may be indicative of the fact this may be a community issue. The district is encouraged to engage with various government, resource agencies, university and college, and other entities to explore this issue and make positive changes.
20. Multiple groups expressed concerns regarding the integration of special education classrooms. Interviewees reported the majority of Level I and Level II classrooms at the high school were isolated from general education classrooms. Interviews indicated this contributed to isolation of students during the day's activities and limit interaction with non-disabled peers. Administrators indicated plans to relocate the special education classrooms

throughout the building beginning next year. It is recommended the relocation plan be given high priority.

Curriculum and Instruction

In an improving district/school, curriculum challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity. There is an emphasis on principles of high quality instruction and clear expectations for what is taught. Educators have a common understanding of quality teaching and learning. Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of learners within the classroom. Teachers have knowledge and skills need to effectively implement characteristics of effective instruction. The staff accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the essential curriculum (e.g., Iowa Core Curriculum). Instructional time is allocated to support student learning. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Educators implement effective instructional practices for each and every student.
- School and classroom tasks and activities are inherently engaging, relevant, and lead to applying knowledge to authentic tasks.
- Content, instruction, assessments, and policy are aligned.
- A shared vision of effective instruction is held by all instructional staff.
- Curriculum and instruction reflect contributions from diverse racial, ethnic, and personal backgrounds.
- Students are provided opportunity and time to learn.
- Teachers are provided with an instructional framework for units that employs research-based strategies for use with diverse learner characteristics.
- Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data.

Noted Strengths:

21. The district is commended for the achievements of the district and its students. For example, the district is ranked the 12th best in the nation according to Expansion Management Magazine. Nearly one-third of Ames High School students retain a grade point of 3.5 or higher. Approximately half of Ames High School graduates attending Iowa Regents Universities maintain a grade point average above 3.0 in their freshman year. The district produces the highest number of National Merit finalists in the state. Thirteen Ames High School graduates have been Presidential Scholars since 1964.
22. Elementary teachers reported having a guaranteed and viable curriculum within core content areas. Grade level content, and time spent teaching content, have been clearly defined. This was a process that initially received resistance, but since implementation it has been viewed as a productive process leading to greater consistency in curriculum among all elementary buildings.
23. High school students reported numerous learning opportunities. Examples included advanced placement (AP) classes in English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, college credit courses through ISU and Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), PLATO (online learning), and independent study.
24. Career and technical education (CTE) teachers identified their classes as creating authentic and hands-on learning opportunities for students. Internships, combined with other mentoring opportunities with local businesses, add to the array of authentic learning experiences. This includes the integration of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) concepts into all CTE courses.

25. CTE teachers reported program area teachers have been meeting with DMACC for the purpose of aligning program areas with a Program of Study (POS). CTE teachers reported being on track with meeting the Perkins Plan requirement of having 75% of their career programs of study aligned with the career programs at the local community college by July 1, 2012.

Recommendations for Improvement:

26. Parents reported limited opportunities for academic advancement at the elementary and middle school levels. The district is encouraged to investigate the implementation of instructional differentiation in reading and mathematics at the elementary level, as well as the use of curriculum compacting and acceleration at the elementary and middle school levels. Exploration of this aligns with the district's Question #3: "What will we do when students have learned it?" Additionally, consider the following inquiry question, "Is the Extended Learning Program (ELP) program designed to be responsive to students' needs, giftedness, and talents or are students to respond to the program that has been set?" For example, parents reported the middle school ELP is focused on math or social studies.

High school students reported anyone can access ELP options if they express interest. High school students also reported classroom teacher expectations are for ELP students to complete regular classroom assignments in addition to the projects stemming from ELP participation. Parents of high school students reported the high school ELP program is pull-out.

The K-12 ELP program is encouraged to do the following:

- Review and possibly revise identification procedures and criteria (more than one) as students move through the K-12 system.
- Collect data regarding the perceptions and expectations of classroom teachers regarding the student work of ELP students.
- Hold conversations and consult with classroom teachers about compacting, accelerating, and differentiating instruction for ELP students as related to the guiding question, "What will we do if they have learned it/already know it?"
- Intentionally communicate the ELP program to students, parents, staff, and the community.

Consider contacting the district's Partnership Director at Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance from the AEA's consultant for gifted and talented.

27. District leaders reported information and student achievement data are reviewed at the central office level. Despite review of the data, an identifiable structure for program evaluation was not found. Question four of the comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP) states, "How will we evaluate our programs and services to ensure improved student learning?" The district is encouraged to consider reviewing data at the building level in addition to the district level. The district might consider using the results of student data review to improve programs. The process can be enhanced by studying subgroup data and the achievement of students in district programs such as ELP and the Alternative Learning Program. The district is encouraged to consider contacting the district's Partnership Director from Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance from the AEA's assessment team in a program review process.

28. Interviews and district data demonstrated the district has provided minimal support to students in the 8th grade career plan planning process as students become 9th and 10th graders. Guidance counselors reported they have begun conversations and are visiting with other districts to learn in what venues and with what staff members guidance counselors collaborate to assist students in developing the plan. District counselors are also visiting other districts to learn ways to accomplish the annual review and update of the plans as students move through the system to graduation. Middle school and high school guidance counselors are encouraged to continue with plans to visit other districts and participate in training through the assistance of Iowa College Aid. The district is expected to move at a swift pace to establish a plan for ensuring students in grades 9 through 12 annually review and/or revise their career plan. For continued assistance, contact Sandra Dop (Sandra.dop@iowa.gov) or Tracy Havener (tracy.havener@iowa.gov).
29. The documentation for the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) 4 - Child Assessment of Child Progress showed evidence the teaching staff used various methods to gather information about children's developmental abilities and progress across a variety of settings and situations. While teaching staff had documentation of individual children's interests, skills, ideas and family concerns, there was limited evidence of the application of these data within the context of instruction. It is recommended the *Developmental Continuum Assessment* data be regularly and frequently analyzed to determine children's learning progression and guide individualized instruction. The district may want to consider utilizing weekly team meetings for professional development and coaching in the area of systematically implementing the assessment system to align curriculum and teaching practices.

Professional Development

In an improving district/school, staff is qualified for assignments and engages in ongoing learning opportunities to improve effectiveness. Student achievement and other sources of data are used to set goals for professional development. The district provides professional learning opportunities that include theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Professional development focus is determined through the analysis of student achievement and performance data.
- Professional development is focused and based on research-based strategies.
- Professional development sessions build on one another, are distributed throughout the school year, and are sustained over time.
- Time is provided for teachers to collaborate and apply new content and pedagogical knowledge.
- An established system provides support to monitor and evaluate implementation of professional development and its impact on student learning.
- Formative student data and teacher implementation data are used to adjust professional development and guide instructional decisions.
- All school staff members, instructional and non-instructional, are provided professional development to support job roles and functions.
- Professional development activities contribute to the capacity of all school staff to develop cultural competence and to reflect and respect diversity in classroom and work environments.

Noted Strengths:

30. PreK-12 teachers reported teacher leaders are encouraged to lead professional development in some areas. For example, elementary Success teachers lead professional development focused on literacy. Five secondary teachers serve as CReating Independent Student-owned Strategies® (CRISS) trainers for all staff. Teacher leaders are respected and serve as resources for other teachers. Elementary principals reported they meet with teacher leader teams on a regular basis to guide professional development.
31. Elementary and middle school teachers and principals reported the PLC structure provides a common dialogue across the district. All staff focus on the district's (DuFour's) four guiding questions. Elementary teachers use PLCs to review student reading achievement data. Middle school teams review student achievement and behavior data in their PLCs. High school teachers reported the PLCs are interdisciplinary and a high school business PLC is designing a moodle class.

Recommendations for Improvement:

32. Teachers appreciated having PLCs, common planning time, and professional development opportunities; however, there is no current district-wide plan for professional development or aligned building plans. Principals voiced an interest in receiving professional development regarding PLCs and instructional rounds, using data to guide decision making, and matching instructional strategies to meet students' needs. Consider establishing a district leadership team to guide professional development in the following ways:
 - Analyzing data to determine needs
 - Studying and selecting research-based strategies
 - Planning professional development
 - Monitoring and evaluating professional development

- Ensuring inclusion of theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback in professional development at the district and building levels
- Ensuring alignment among district-wide professional development plan, building plans, and individual teacher growth plans
- Including administrators and teachers representative of each attendance center on the district leadership team for professional development who will in turn serve with others on their building team

Consider contacting the district's Partnership Director from Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance for training staff in PLCs.

Monitoring and Accountability

In an improving district/school, the district/school establishes a comprehensive system that monitors and documents performance of student progress, curriculum, instruction, programs, and initiatives. Results from assessments drive the goal setting and decision-making processes. Leadership supports a system that regularly analyzes student performance and program effectiveness. Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

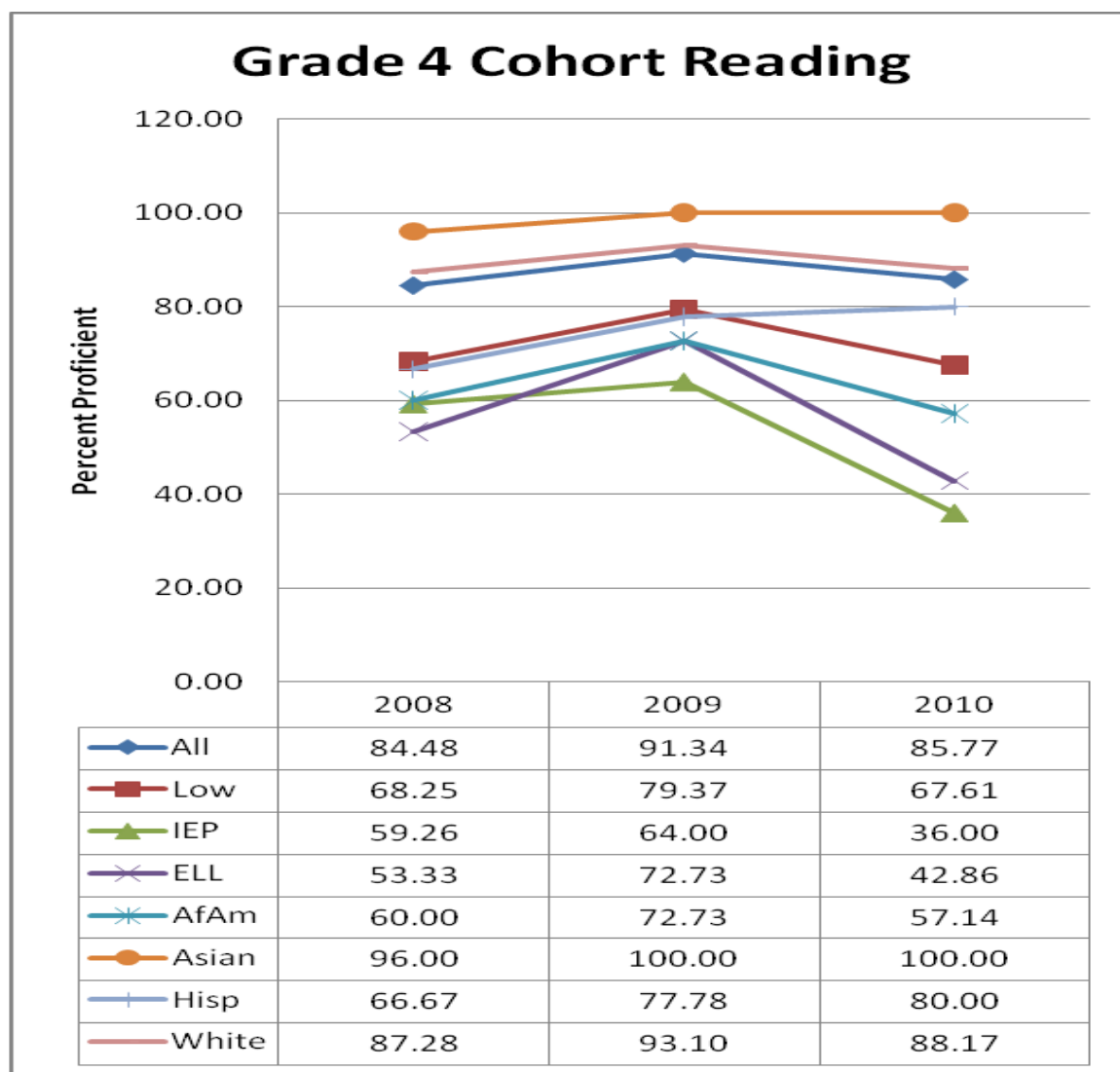
- A system for district-wide student assessments, including multiple measures that are valid and reliable, is implemented.
- Decision-making for the continuous improvement of instruction and student learning using student achievement and teacher implementation data is employed.
- The district's/school's cycle of program evaluation as noted in its CSIP is implemented.
- Summative evaluation processes are used to determine whether professional development has resulted in improved student learning.

Noted Strengths:

33. School board members reported when buildings wish to initiate new programs, a process is followed to gain approval for implementation. Principals provide information about the program or initiative, including the intended outcomes, how it will be evaluated, the timeline for success, a summary of the research supporting the program or initiative, and the potential financial impact. Board members also ask if similar programs or initiatives are currently being implemented and how the principal knows the proposed program or initiative will be more successful. Initiatives are becoming more focused through this process. For example, board members noted one principal has said his/her building is focusing on the implementation of one initiative for five years, monitoring progress along the way, and evaluating effectiveness.
34. Multiple interview groups at the elementary level stated they review classroom and multiple individual student data points to make instructional decisions. Data are used to make decisions about instructional focus, intervention placement, and progress monitoring. Student achievement data are the focus of the district and drive professional learning communities (PLCs) in elementary buildings, as well as discussions about how to best serve the needs of all students.
35. CTE teachers reported using data to review student performance with administrators as a step in decreasing the achievement gap. For example, CTE teachers use the Heartland Educational Assessment Resource Toolbox (HEART) database to review student achievement data and make course and instructional decisions.
36. Although individual student areas of noncompliance were identified during the district's Special Education program procedural compliance review completed last fall, evidence has been submitted as of January 19, 2011 that these corrections have been made. The DE has also received a copy of the AEA letter stating that the district level corrective action plan (CAP) has been fully implemented within the required timelines and all requirements have been met.

Recommendations for Improvement:

37. An analysis of Ames CSD adequate yearly progress (AYP) data was conducted by the site visit team to examine trends in student achievement over the most recent three-year period. A subgroup by grade analysis shows how well different subgroups in the same grade are performing. All groups declined in the percent proficient, except Asians, over the three-year period. Results are for all subgroups and four AYP grades (3, 4, 5, and 6) over a three year period of time. These data reflect results for similar (not the same) groups of students over three years. The district is encouraged to engage administrators, teachers, parents, and the community in studying these data, developing questions of inquiry to learn factors influencing these trends, and seeking assistance from Heartland AEA in addressing student achievement gaps.



38. While the Ames CSD met all of the SWVPP Assurances and the IQPPS Required Criteria, the district must meet a minimum of 85% of the IQPPS Other Criteria in each of the ten standards. The following two standards are below the required 85% level: Standard 1 –

Relationships; and Standard 4 – Assessment of Child Progress. For those Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards met at less than 85%, Ames CSD must develop a corrective action plan within 45 days of the last day of the Ames school improvement site visit. The *Corrective Action Plan for Assurances and Criteria* is completed in the Iowa Department of Education Web Application Server Early Childhood Application on the DE Secure Reporting Site at <http://iowa.gov/educate> under the selected district for Ames CSD. Specific comments and recommendations for IQPPS Other Criteria may be found under *IQPPS Criteria* at Iowa Department of Education Web Application Server Early Childhood Application on the DE Secure Reporting Site at <http://iowa.gov/educate> under the selected district for Ames CSD.

The status of the Ames Community School District as an Iowa Department of Education approved Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children will remain in effect unless timelines specified in the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards Report are not met.

39. According to the Iowa Association of School Boards, the traits of effective school board members include members who focus their efforts on serving all children, understand the board's roles and responsibilities, work well as members of a team, act with professionalism and integrity, and commit the time and energy required to be effective. The best way to know if the board is functioning well is to undergo a thorough assessment annually. Although the board is currently using a self-assessment at each meeting, it is recommended the assessment be modified and expanded to assess the degree to which meetings function well and the effectiveness of board members achieving their intended outcomes. Each aspect of evaluation would be strengthened by feedback from multiple stakeholders: those who contribute to the process and participate in it and those who are impacted by the process. Consider contacting the district's Partnership Director from Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance with the AEA's assessment team.

Questions and data points to consider in assessing the effectiveness of board meetings could include the following:

- What procedures have the board developed for placing meeting materials and notices in the hands of board members, media, and public leaders before the meeting?
- How consistently does the board president regularly meet with the superintendent to plan board meeting agendas?
- How consistently has each board member come prepared for board meetings, having read reports and ready to discuss substantive matters?
- How regularly do board meetings begin on time and follow the noted time allocations?
- During meetings, how consistently does an appointed person periodically signal the board president of time remaining for the agenda item?
- How consistently does the board president ensure all board members have an opportunity to participate in discussions?
- How easily understood by the public is method for providing input at school board meetings?
- How does the board know visitors feel welcome at school board meetings?
- What is the balance between policy discussions and other school board responsibilities compared to discussions about board support for student learning and achievement?

Questions to consider in assessing the effectiveness of board members' performance could include:

- In what ways does the board focus on students' needs and providing the best possible learning environment?
- In what ways does the board involve the community in developing a shared vision, mission, and philosophy to guide the district?
- What are some examples of the board and superintendent learning together and using research, experience and other information to reach effective decisions?
- How well does the board use policy making to improve the learning environment?
- How does the board encourage staff to learn about and implement instructional strategies and analyze their effectiveness?
- How frequently does the board receive reports on student progress from a variety of sources?
- How does the board actively promote community awareness of district progress and needs?
- In what ways does the board celebrate the achievements of students, staff, volunteers and others?

40. Review of documents and interviews with some staff members indicated a formal process for program evaluation to determine the impact of district resource allocation is limited. For example, there were minimal data related to the effectiveness of various initiatives such as the PLCs, Instructional Rounds, Responsive Classrooms, and programs such as Extended Learning Program, at-risk, special education including co-teaching, and professional development. Although interviewees reported positively about certain aspects of programs, when probed about how effectiveness is monitored, most evidence referred to informal or observational data. When asked about how programs are evaluated, responses tended to be anecdotal, reflecting usage of satisfaction data as evidence of program effectiveness. Student outcomes were not typically mentioned as a part of evaluation. In order to provide internal and external stakeholders with a clear understanding of district priorities, it may be helpful to clarify program goals and use a district-wide communication plan for strategically disseminating progress towards goals. As part of the evaluation process, consider the following questions:

- What data will best determine to what degree programs meet initiative and district goals?
- What are data saying?
- What further questions emerge from data analysis?
- What data will best inform stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community) about program effectiveness?
- When and how should program progress and effectiveness be shared with stakeholders?

The district may wish to consider adopting a standard program evaluation protocol and train staff in its use. In addition, the district could also benefit from applying the protocol to all existing programs to assist in identifying programs for revision, elimination, or expansion. An established evaluation protocol, used consistently across the district, could assist in providing focus for district-wide conversations.

The protocol could include a systemic approach to the collection and use of assessment data including, but not limited to, clearly defining screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data tools and processes across content domains. Consider contacting the district's Partnership Director at Heartland AEA to coordinate assistance.

41. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires all teachers to be highly qualified.

Collaboration is one way to meet that requirement when special education teachers are not licensed in specific content areas, most often at the secondary level. Although the BEDS report indicated the Collaborative Consultative Model is used at the high school level, multiple interviews and data review did not verify this information. Examples of inappropriate implementation of this model at the high school level included the following:

- Some special education teacher schedules (Level II and Level III) reflected the delivery of primary instruction in core content areas in which they are not endorsed as a teacher.
- Some special education teachers assign grades for a subject in which she/he has no content endorsement.
- All official records reviewed indicated the special education teacher was the teacher of record.
- Documentation is not available to indicate special education teachers using the reverse collaborative model regularly to consult with general education teachers in such areas as IEP goal attainment, application of skills in the general education setting, specially designed instruction, and progress monitoring, etc. There was no documentation indicating general education teachers and reverse collaborative teachers have regularly scheduled common planning time.

The district is encouraged to contact Heartland AEA to provide on-site training on the roles and responsibilities of general education and special education teachers regarding the reverse consultation collaborative model. The district is also encouraged to seek assistance from its student software management company to ensure highly qualified teachers are appropriately entered into the system as teachers of record.

This is an area for targeted technical assistance from Heartland AEA who will contact the district in the near future to plan assistance.

42. While elementary principals reported the use of strategies to ensure poor and minority students are not placed at a higher rate than their peers in classrooms with inexperienced teachers, at the secondary level there was no evidence this was occurring. The district is expected to develop strategies to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at a higher rate than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. The district might consider the following suggestions:

- Ensure a district-wide procedure is in place to review enrollment rates of poor and minority students assigned to first and second year teachers.
- Ensure placement of poor and minority students is not disproportionate in any classroom.

- As an administrative team, review the hiring process to ensure the process is not contributing to poor and minority students being taught at a higher rate than other students by inexperienced teachers. For example, review the application, interview process, selection and placement decisions, and mentoring and induction program.
- Ensure each attendance center establishes a procedure for the annual review of attendance center, program, and course enrollment data disaggregated by gender, racial/ethnic background, and disability and data are reviewed from a trend line perspective to inform decision-making.
- Use PLCs to discuss how the total staff can establish a supportive culture for inexperienced teachers, such as course assignments and number of preparations.

Ames Community School District's Compliance Status for Applicable Federal Programs:

Title IIA (Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund)

The district has no citations of Title IIA non-compliance identified during this visit.

Title IID (Enhancing Education through Technology, E2T2)

The district has no citations of Title IID non-compliance identified during this visit.

Title III (English Language Learners)

The district has no citations of Title III non-compliance identified during this visit.

Title IVA (Safe and Drug Free Schools)

The district has no citations of Title IVA (SDFSC) non-compliance identified during this visit.

Title XC (Education of Homeless Children and Youth)

The district has no citations of Title XC non-compliance identified during this visit.

Areas of Non-Compliance: Chapter 12

The district shall submit a plan of correction for each non-compliance item listed below to the Site Visit Team Leader within 45 business days of the receipt of this report. Evidence of corrective action for non-compliance(s) may be submitted with the plan or at a later date in accordance with the noted timeline. The district may choose to use the following matrix as a format for the development of an action plan or develop its own.

Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
<p>1. SIAC5 No evidence exists the School Improvement Advisory Committee makes recommendations to the board about major educational needs; student learning goals; long range goals, including the state indicators that address reading, mathematics, and science achievement; and harassment or bullying prevention goals, programs, training, and other initiatives. 281 – IAC 12.8(1)(a)(2)</p>	<p>Feedback: Reading, math, and science goals for 2010-2011 were verified; however, no documentation was provided demonstrating the SIAC made recommendations to the board for the 2010-2011 school year or that recommendations addressed harassment and bullying prevention.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Provide a copy of the board meeting minutes demonstrating the SIAC made recommendations for reading, math, science, and harassment and bullying prevention for the 2011-2012 school year.</p>		<p>September 30, 2011</p>
<p>2. SCP4 No evidence exists that a school counselor serves as a member of the instructional team for each attendance center.</p>	<p>Feedback: The site visit team was unable to verify a licensed guidance counselor serves as a member of the instructional team at each attendance at the elementary level. While the elementary schools do have licensed counselors on staff, they are not assigned the duties of a</p>		<p>August 15, 2011</p>

Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
281 – IAC 12.3(11)(a)	<p>school counselor. They serve as At-Risk Counselors with job roles and responsibilities different that of a school counselor.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Provide a plan for ensuring each elementary employs a school counselor who serves as a member of the instructional team.</p>		
3. EQ5 No evidence exists to indicate the school or school district provides equal opportunity to participate in programs by gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, socioeconomic status, disability, race, national origin, color, religion, and creed. 281—IAC 12.1(1)	<p>Feedback: Board policy AC (also JB) omits reference to creed when stating the ways the district will not discriminate in equal opportunity to the educational program.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Provide revised policy AC (also JB) and a copy of the board meeting minutes highlighting the board’s approval of the revised policy.</p>		July 1, 2011
4. SPEDAIM1 The district has no evidence it has worked with publishers to address Accessible Instructional Materials requirements. 281-IAC12.5(9) and 281-41.210(256B,34CFR300)	<p>Feedback: The district does not currently have agreements in place with textbook publishers to address Accessible Instructional Materials requirements.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Although it has been several years since the district purchased textbook materials, submit a written request to the publishers of current district textbooks they agree to provide instructional materials for students who are blind or who have print disabilities. Forward a copy of the publishers’ responses.</p>		July 1, 2011
5. PD4 No evidence exists that all employees are prepared to work with	<p>Feedback: The district did not provide a current district-wide professional development plan or aligned individual</p>		August 15, 2011

Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
<p>diverse learners and to implement multicultural, gender fair approaches to the educational program. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(a)</p> <p>ACPD1 Professional development plans are not in place for each district attendance center. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(b)</p> <p>ACPD2.1 Attendance center professional development plans are not in place that address the needs of the teachers in that center. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(b)</p> <p>ACPD2.2 Attendance center professional development plans are not in place that address the Iowa teaching standards. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(b)</p> <p>ACPD2.3 Attendance center professional development plans are not in place that address the district professional development plan. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(b)</p>	<p>attendance center professional development plans with attention to preparing all employees to work with diverse learners and to implement multicultural, gender fair approaches into the educational program; data demonstrating professional development meets the needs of teachers at each attendance center; address the Iowa Teaching Standards; or that address the district student learning goals.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Provide a three-year district professional development plan accompanied by aligned attendance center plans incorporating the above elements.</p>		

Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
<p>ACPD2.4 Attendance center professional development plans are not in place that address the student achievement goals of the attendance center and the school district as set forth in the CSIP. 281—IAC 12.7(1)(b)</p>			
<p>6. PE8 The school district does not implement its evaluation procedures for all administrators. 281—IAC 12.3(3) and Iowa Code 279. 23A</p>	<p>Feedback: No evidence of the annual evaluation of central office administrators or building principals was provided.</p> <p>Evidence Needed: Provide evidence of all administrator evaluation by July 1, 2011 for the 2010-2011 school year. The site visit team leader will schedule an appointment for the review at the district's central office.</p>		<p>July 1, 2011</p>

Areas of Non-Compliance: Outside of Chapter 12

Outside of Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
<p>1. EQD1 The district does not have a policy on non-discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity (EQD1). Title IX 34CFR 106.9 Section 5</p> <p>2. EQD2 The district does not have a non-discrimination notification statement: annual notification in newspaper or newsletter that goes to all community folks Section 504 34 CFR 104.8, Title IX 34 CFR 106.9, OCR Guidelines IV.O and V.C.</p> <p>3. EQD3 The district does not have a nondiscrimination notification in major written publications: Parent, student, employee handbooks,</p>	<p>Feedback: The district's non-discrimination statement used as its annual notification in newspaper or newsletter that goes to all community folks omits reference to creed and socioeconomic status (for programs).</p> <p>Feedback: The district's non-discrimination statement omits reference to creed and socioeconomic status.</p> <p>A review of documents demonstrated the omission of some of the protected classes from some district publications and venues, such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle school parent handbook; parent handbooks from Edwards, Fellows, Meeker, and Mitchell, and district web site The policy is not included at all in the high school handbook. Please review all student and parent handbooks. For example in most elementary parent handbooks, the non-discrimination statement is listed twice. The first entry is correct in each, the second entry typically omits one or more protected classes. <p>Evidence Needed: Provide the revised non-discrimination statement and examples of the revised statement in a newspaper or district newsletter, as well as in major district publications such as handbooks, web site, etc.</p>		<p>Statement: July 1, 2011</p> <p>Newspaper/newsletter and major district publications: August 15, 2011</p>

Outside of Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
Registration handbook, Coaches handbooks, Brochures about the district, Web site, and School newsletters Section 504 34 CFR 104.8 Title IX 34 CFR 106.9, OCR Guidelines IV.O and V.C.			
4. EQD4 The district does not have a plan that addresses equal employment opportunity and affirmative action in employment. Iowa Code 19B.11, 281—IAC Chapter 95	Feedback: The district's Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Plan omits the following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EEO/AA did not include the district's anti-bullying & harassment policy. • The administrative statement was not signed or dated. • The EEO/AA plan did not include qualitative analyses, qualitative goals, workforce analyses, quantitative analyses, or numerical goals. Evidence Needed: Provide the revised EEO/AA plan.		August 15, 2011