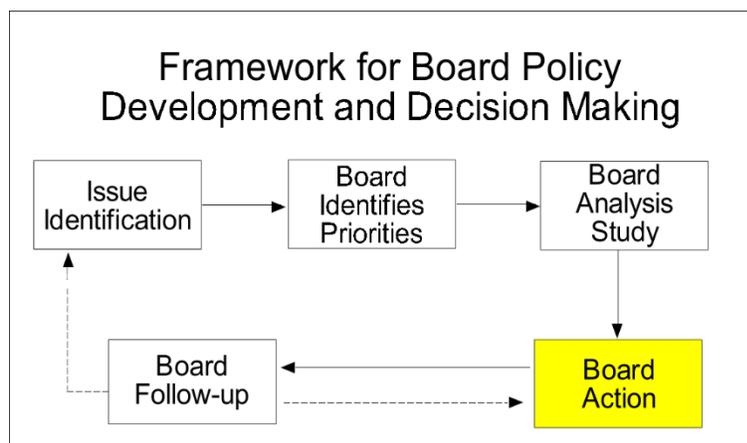


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 16, 2019



Agenda Item: Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) Comprehensive Accreditation Report—Fiscal Year 2019

State Board Priority: Supporting Future Ready Iowa

State Board Role/Authority: Iowa Code section 260C.47(3) grants authority to the State Board of Education to determine whether the programs of a community college shall remain accredited.

Presenter(s): Barbara Burrows, Chief
Bureau of Community Colleges

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation for Northeast Iowa Community College. A state interim accreditation evaluation will be conducted in fiscal year 2023.

Background: This is a report of the evaluation of NICC for continued state accreditation as an associate degree-granting institution. The Department of Education conducted the on-site portion of the evaluation on October 18-19, 2018. This report reflects the review team's observations and determinations made during NICC's comprehensive desk and site reviews.

As mandated by Iowa Code sections 260C.47, the accreditation team, including two external peer reviewers, assessed NICC's compliance with eight Iowa State Accreditation Standards via a structured process of document review and on-site interviews. The team also reviewed the most recent Higher Learning Commission (HLC) regional accreditation report to ensure that any findings have been or are being addressed. Like the state accreditation process, HLC conducts college reviews every five years; however, Iowa's process has been designed not to duplicate that process.

Accreditation Report
Comprehensive State Evaluation

Northeast Iowa Community College

October 18-19, 2018

FY 2019



**COMMUNITY COLLEGES &
WORKFORCE PREPARATION**
PROSPERITY THROUGH EDUCATION

**State of Iowa
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146**

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Northeast Iowa Community College
Comprehensive Accreditation Evaluation
FY 2019 (Academic Year 2018-2019)**

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**Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC)
Comprehensive State Accreditation Evaluation
FY 2019 – Conducted October 18-19, 2018**

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this review was a scheduled accreditation evaluation of Northeast Iowa Community College by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) as mandated by Iowa Code Section 260C.47.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

College History¹

In 1966, the State Board of Education approved the formation of the Area I Vocational-Technical School, with Calmar as its administrative headquarters. This included the public school districts in Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek counties, as well as sections of Bremer, Buchanan, and Mitchell counties.

On September 5, 1967, career education programs in Calmar began with 170 students enrolled in 12 programs. The school broke ground on construction of college facilities on the 210-acre Calmar campus, which now include Darwin L. Schrage Administration Building, Max Clark Hall, Wilder Business Center, industrial technologies, a student center, agricultural technologies, a child development center, and Iowa's Dairy Center – a \$4.1 million dairy education center and applied research laboratory built in 2000. The Merged Area I Vocational-Technical School was enlarged in 1970 to include the public school districts in Dubuque and Delaware counties, and sections of Jones and Jackson counties. In 1971, career education programs in Dubuque began at several locations throughout the city, including the Roshek building.

In April 1979, the Area I Vocational-Technical School changed its name to Northeast Iowa Technical Institute. That same year, the Peosta campus was established. The Peosta campus currently includes the main building, the Gas Utilities and Construction Building, a child development center, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety, and most recently the Industrial Technologies Building, which opened in August 2010.

In 1988, the institute was authorized by the Iowa Board of Education to award the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Associate of Applied Science degrees, as well as diplomas and certificates. The institute then changed its name to Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC).

NICC has since expanded to include service locations in Cresco, Dubuque, New Hampton, Manchester, Oelwein, and Waukon. The purpose of these locations is to bring education and training to students where they live and to serve as a catalyst for economic development. A prime example of NICC's commitment to economic development occurred in 2008 when the college's Town Clock Business Center in Dubuque was expanded to include a one-stop center with Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA).

In December 2007, taxpayers passed (by supermajority) a \$35 million renovation and construction bond levy for NICC. These funds supported construction and renovation of the industrial technologies buildings on each campus, the student center on the Calmar campus, renovations to the health and science labs and a new library on the Peosta campus, Darwin L. Schrage Administration building in Calmar, and the Wilder Business Center, which opened in January 2013.

In 2018, under the leadership of its current president, Liang Chee Wee, Ph.D., NICC had a \$39 million bond issue approved by their region’s voters. This, again, demonstrates the communities’ acknowledgement of the college’s value to the northeast region of Iowa.

Institutional Profile²

Northeast Iowa Community College is a public, two-year comprehensive community college serving a mostly rural, eight-county district in northeast Iowa. According to its college profile, published annually by the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation (Division), in 2017 NICC serviced 6,299 credit students and ranked 8th in enrollment out of Iowa’s 15 community colleges and 1st in joint enrollment, with 48.8 percent of its credit students being in high school taking concurrent enrollment courses. Furthermore, NICC ranked 5th in the state graduation rate and 6th in the state success rate (i.e., graduated and/or transferred to a four-year institution).

NICC offers 84 credit programs at its campuses and via distance learning, customized business and industry training, short-term certification options, and adult education and literacy. The college ranks 6th in students enrolled in distance learning and 4th in non-credit student enrollment with 20,026 students. The college is committed to high-quality education and training at an affordable price to ensure the growth and vitality of northeast Iowa.

NICC’s service area spans 5,000 square miles and is served by two campuses in Calmar and Peosta, six centers in Dubuque (two locations), and centers in Oelwein, Waukon, Cresco, and Manchester. In addition, NICC provides services in New Hampton and hosts the region’s Small Business Development Center in Dubuque, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety in Peosta, and Iowa’s Dairy Center in Calmar. With all of these sites, NICC ranks 8th in the community penetration rate (i.e., the percentage of the region’s college-age population attending the college) with credit and non-credit student enrollment combined.

As a testament to how well Northeast Iowa Community College serves its expansive, diverse region, the college, governed by a nine-member elected Board of Trustees, was named among the 2011 Aspen Top Ten community colleges in the nation for its successful graduate outcomes, academic excellence, and community impact. Under the leadership of its current president, Liang Chee Wee, Ph.D., NICC recently celebrated its 50th anniversary and pledged to be more committed than ever to transforming and honoring its communities, one student at a time.

¹ Information for this section was obtained through interviews with college staff and from the NICC website at: <https://www.nicc.edu/aboutnicc/collegeprofile/history/>.

² Information was obtained from the 2016 AQIP Systems Portfolio and the 2017 Community College Profile.

Special Topic Summary – Flexible, Competency-Based, CTE Programming

Northeast Iowa Community College's leadership shared a desire to learn more about creating flexible, competency-based, career and technical education (CTE) programming that incorporates best practices for work-based learning (WBL) such as the earn-and-learn models, business and industry sponsorships, and recognized industry credentialing. NICC wants to continue developing better connections between credit and noncredit offerings, more open lab environment options, and flexible start and stop models. Their local industries are invested with them into the curricular process, so they wanted to learn about what other colleges in Iowa are doing in this arena.

In addition, with so many students in their region working while attending college (between 60 and 70 percent of NICC students are part-time) and an unemployment rate that is very low, NICC has learned that one of the best ways to serve these students is by creating career choice options through the development of part-time program pathways. The college understands that this type of offering means working through financial aid requirements, instructor load issues, and pursuing supplemental funding.

For their "Special Topic", NICC requested a presentation of other community college examples of formal business partnerships in which these types of programming occur, including examples of applied learning in formal lab experiences, and credit for prior learning best practices. Representatives from three peer institutions - Des Moines Area (DMACC), Kirkwood (KCC), and Indian Hills (IHCC) - participated in a discussion of these models.

The lead instructional designer for KCC's competency-based education (CBE) model shared the process for program development and instructor training at their college. In their region, KCC found that high school students are coming to the college looking for additional CBE-type learning experiences, and that several faculty members who have gone through the training have become proponents of the model. KCC's Business Management program is farthest along in CBE development and much has been learned since its inception. A collegewide committee is looking at ways to have open-entry/open-exit options for students while dealing with complex issues of regional accreditation, financial aid, transcription, faculty load and pay, scheduling, and demonstration of competencies for employers.

The academic dean of Liberal Arts at DMACC shared information about the academic programming they have engaged in with the Local 33 steamfitters union in central Iowa. DMACC utilized a fast-paced curricular model to provide general education credits for workers within a short timeframe. The students were preselected from an existing apprenticeship program. While this model worked for the union employers for a number of years, they have decided to go back to utilizing courses for students from within DMACC's usual schedule for the upcoming year.

The associate dean for Advanced Technologies at IHCC described their college's Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) process. They offer CPL for a variety of experiential learning through processes such as credit by examination; military education and training; noncredit articulated learning; and industry-recognized third-party certificates, credentials, and licensure. Also, they have a Reverse Internal Articulation process to transition from noncredit to credit. While IHCC has not had many students pursue CPL, they recently worked with an apprenticeship student to convert on-the-job experiences to CTE credit and continue to be engaged in statewide discussions about articulating military learning experiences.

Community colleges are starting to focus on CBE, CPL, WBL, and industry-specific programming largely because of growing competition. Private colleges are pursuing these options and apprenticeship models are being incentivized by businesses throughout the state. NICC gained helpful information and contacts from this "Special Topic" discussion, and learned that making this work requires collegewide commitment.

ASSURANCE SUMMARY STATE STANDARDS

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Department's state accreditation team (DE team) reviewed NICC's most recent HLC report and all related information available at the time of this evaluation. Northeast Iowa's HLC accreditation letter provided adequate evidence that the college has continuing regional accreditation with a few concerns documented in selected areas of assessment, financial health, online instruction, and concurrent enrollment instruction. After responding to each of these concerns in a required follow-up report, completed over the past 18 months, an HLC letter received in October 2018, states that "no further reports are required" and NICC maintains accreditation through academic year 2026-27.

As part of their HLC follow-up report, NICC demonstrated that they have aggressively implemented a comprehensive strategy for embedding learning outcomes assessment at various course, program, and general education levels. NICC joined the HLC assessment academy and attended training sessions where they had created a four-year assessment plan, entitled CLASS (Celebrating Learning Ann Student Success); however, the HLC review team requested that they implement the strategies within the plan more expeditiously, so they did so within 18 months. Although rushed, the assessment plan seems comprehensive and should be sustainable moving forward.

NICC showed the DE team their tool to collect and document learning assessments (direct, indirect, formative, and summative) across the institution, and to monitor progress via their Bright Space Learning Management System. Faculty have created embedded assessments in all courses that are connected to institutional common learning outcomes. The college is collecting data on student outcomes across all courses and programs, including general education and Liberal Arts and Sciences. Additionally, they are incorporating co-curricular activities into their assessment plan and encouraging non-academic departments such as Career Services, Enrollment Services, and Student Life to align their existing program learning outcomes with the institution's common learning outcomes.

With regard to the other HLC concerns (financial health and concurrent enrollment), NICC provided timely written responses and detailed evidential documentation. The college should be commended for their responsiveness to the HLC, particularly since, had the review team investigated each concern more closely, they may have realized that neither constituted a compliance issue.

During the DE team's report out to NICC's administration, faculty, and staff in attendance, it was recommended that the faculty, perhaps through the Quality Faculty Plan Committee structure, read both the HLC report and NICC's follow-up report so that they might better understand the accreditation process and the importance of their involvement in the resolution strategies. Assessment of student learning outcomes is paramount and cannot be successfully institutionalized without faculty buy-in and leadership.

Compliance with Iowa State Accreditation Standards

Faculty Qualifications

All community college-employed instructors who are under contract as of July 1, 2011, who teach in career and technical education (CTE) or arts and sciences, including adjuncts, are required to meet minimum faculty standards (Iowa Code, section 260C.48). The DE team reviewed a random sample of faculty personnel files provided by the Human Resources office to ensure compliance with this standard.

The DE team provided a random list of 20 faculty members who taught credit courses in the previous year for whom NICC provided personnel files with supporting documentation such as college transcripts,

employment applications to illustrate related work experience, and third-party licensure/certification, if applicable. Select members of the DE team then examined the files to determine whether the qualifications of each faculty member complied with current Iowa Code faculty standards for the courses he or she taught during academic year (AY) 2017 (i.e., fall term 2016 and spring 2017).

Following a thorough review of the 20 personnel files, members of the DE team met with NICC's human resources director and chief academic officer (CAO) to learn about the college's faculty qualification review process and to discuss a few individual concerns raised during the file review. NICC documented faculty qualifications consistently with an internally created form aligned with the form provided by the statewide Faculty Standards Task Force. They provided complete instructional folders containing transcripts, applications, resumes, and other related materials.

Upon initial review, the personnel files of three instructors did not contain sufficient documentation to qualify them for some courses taught in 2017. Further discussion with the hiring administrators confirmed that one of the nursing instructors in question was on a path to achieving a Master's degree, and that being on that path meets the requirement for nursing instructors in the associate degree program. The other two faculty no longer teach at the college due to retirements. However, because those instructors had been allowed to teach the courses in question during their employment (i.e., reviewed AY2017), there is an expectation that NICC will continue to improve and refine its faculty qualification assessment.

Finding: Based on the DE team's review of faculty qualifications, it was determined that two instructors did not meet state minimum faculty standards for some of the courses they taught in AY 2017. Details of each of these findings were shared with NICC's CAO and Human Resources director, who shared that determination had been made internally before the 2018 academic year to no longer utilize those instructors for the courses in question. These instructors have since retired.

The CAO reported that the college has improved its qualification review process and does not employ adjuncts or full-time faculty who do not meet Iowa and HLC standards. It is recommended that they should review their faculty qualification process, including how they train academic administrators for consistent reviews, and routinely audit personnel files to ensure that instances of non-compliance do not occur in the future.

Faculty Teaching Load

The teaching loads of community college instructors must not exceed the faculty load limits set forth in Iowa Code. This is the case for CTE instructors, as well as for college parallel (arts and sciences) instructors (Iowa Code, Section 260C.48). To check compliance with this standard, the DE team reviewed the instructional loads of a random sample of 20 faculty members for whom NICC provided documentation of their AY2017 (fall 2016 and spring 2017 terms) teaching loads.

NICC provided adequate and consistent documentation of the AY2017 teaching loads of the 20 faculty under review. Load procedures were also explained and the common load form included comparison information of the individual faculty load to the average college load and average department load. The DE team determined that NICC's faculty teach load practices are compliant and consistently applied for all types of instructors.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Special Needs

Community colleges shall provide equal access to the full range of program offerings and services including, but not limited to, recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulation. Students with disabilities shall be given access to the full range of program offerings at a college through reasonable accommodations (Iowa Administrative Code 24.5(3)), with information regarding how to access such accommodations provided in a disability statement. In addition, community colleges shall have nondiscrimination statements ensuring access to educational programs and employment for state and federally protected classes. This nondiscrimination statement must list all state and federally protected classes; provide the name/title and contact information of the person(s) designated to coordinate equity, Title IX, and Section 504 compliance; and provide contact information for the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in Chicago, Illinois. The nondiscrimination and disability statements may be separate or the college may choose to combine them.

The DE team conducted a desk review prior to the onsite visit in which they reviewed NICC's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and nondiscrimination policies, statements, and practices in marketing and recruitment publications, handbooks, the college catalog, the college website, and sample course syllabi. During the onsite visit, the team reviewed additional documentation and conducted interviews with faculty, students, and staff associated with Disabilities Services to ensure compliance with this standard.

During the onsite visit, the DE team saw evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students, provide accommodations for students with special needs, and provide opportunities for underrepresented students in particular programs of study. Some of these observed efforts include the following:

- The NICC president started the visit with the statement that being inclusive and equitable “permeates everything we do.” Whether it be through finding ways to help students with child care, housing, or transportation, the college works with internal and external service providers to help students avoid financial and academic issues. One of many examples of how the college is helping students was a *crisis fundraiser* where funds were raised from the community to help NICC students with emergency issues that might otherwise cause them to drop out of college.
- NICC is in their fifth year of engagement with the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE). Over the years, more than 400 college faculty and staff have been through equity training and NAPE toolkits have been supplied to high school partners. To date, they have used \$150K of Perkins funds for equity efforts, including having faculty review the root causes of student enrollment differences in CTE programs, improving CTE recruiting efforts, engaging diverse students in STEM opportunities, pushing faculty understanding of a ‘growth mindset’ and micro-messaging, increasing student self-efficacy, and celebrating the uniqueness of all individuals.
- NICC is examining teaching strategies that address students’ need for greater flexibility (particularly with working adults) through earn-and-learn models within the academic pathway. Their current exploration of open-entry/open-exit, competency-based learning, the expansion of credit for prior learning, and the inclusion of work-based learning opportunities, holds great potential for being more responsive and meaningful to students.
- NICC partners with Dubuque Works to serve their diverse population, particularly those dealing with poverty. They developed an outreach model to build trust and encourage these at-risk populations to pursue education and training opportunities. Through this outreach effort, the use of Gap and PACE resources, and economic development partnerships, NICC now has between 30 and 40 percent minority enrollment at its Dubuque Center.
- NICC has an effective Disabilities Office with an informative handbook and professional development opportunities for faculty (including video resources). They also coordinate services

well between the two campuses with each campus auditing the other for consistency.

- The team saw evidence of a culture of inclusiveness through both a poster campaign entitled “Respect I-4” and an initiative to update CTE program brochures and recruiting materials to illustrate student diversity.

Regarding NICC’s nondiscrimination statements, the college is working to make its continuous statement consistent across all college materials designed for student recruiting or regarding academic programs and student services. The DE team pointed out numerous inconsistencies found in their material, such as instances in which the statement had more or fewer protected categories than the website/catalog statement (e.g., differences among the 2016 Board Policy, Student Handbook, Senior Year Plus handbook, and one sample syllabus). In some other documents, some contact information was missing (e.g., one sample syllabus and the Agriculture and Automotive cluster recruitment material). Lastly, the continuous statements was missing from some important documents, such as the Quality Faculty Plan, Strategic Plan, and Career Hub services brochure.

The annual nondiscrimination statement can be identical to the continuous statement, but must include a listing of all CTE programs offered at the college, with any special admissions criteria spelled out for individual programs. NICC’s annual statement included a listing of career clusters rather than individual college programs offered, and it did not indicate any special admissions criteria for those programs that have criteria above general college admissions.

Finding: NICC will conduct a formal review of their current material designed to recruit and inform students about academic programs and student services, as well as all handbooks, policies, and contracts/agreements regarding employment, admissions, or student activities, to ensure that the nondiscrimination statement is complete and consistent. They will also develop a process to ensure consistency in the publication of the statement.

The college will update its annual nondiscrimination statement to include all CTE credit programs that are offered, with information about any special admission criteria (i.e., beyond general college admission) of individual programs, when applicable.

By May 1, 2019, NICC will share updated statement examples and their process for ensuring consistency in statement publication with the DE team.

CTE Program Evaluations and Timelines

There are a variety of state standards related to the offering of CTE programs included in Iowa Code, Chapter 258, 281—IAC 46.7(4), and 281—IAC 24.5(4). These standards include numerous requirements related to program and award length, program content, labor market demand, articulation, advisory committees, and more. All CTE programs (including new programs and changes to existing programs) must be approved by the DE. Standards for CTE programs are included in the *Program Approval: Guidelines for Iowa Community Colleges* and in the *State Accreditation Guide* on the DE website.

The DE utilizes a web-based platform for its CTE program approval process and maintains a database of approved programs and courses. This platform performs compliance checks on all CTE programs offered by each college. The DE team reviewed this compliance check for NICC’s CTE programs to ensure compliance with the state program standards. For the standards regarding program advisory committees’ composition, roles, and responsibilities, the DE team reviewed a random sample of CTE advisory committee membership lists and meeting minutes to ensure compliance.

Additionally, community colleges are required to review at least 20 percent of their CTE programs annually, standards for which are provided in the aforementioned program approval guideline and accreditation guide on the DE website. The DE team reviewed NICC's CTE program review process, schedule, and a random sample of CTE program reviews to ensure compliance with state standards.

During the onsite team interviews, the DE team learned about numerous program review process improvements that NICC has instituted. Some of these observed efforts include the following:

- NICC uses program review templates for consistency and to help faculty and new administrators get familiar with the review process. Instructors are allowed to blend external accreditation review information into the college process for efficiency. Deans assist faculty with the process and there is additional training available.
- The college has made impressive enhancements to their program review process with a focus on continuous improvement and the use of embedded data for decision-making. Faculty are engaged in an inquiry-based approach that involves annual reviews, embedded outcomes assessment (Year 3), and a comprehensive review (Year 5), which involves a presentation given to a Program Evaluation Team (PET) consisting of faculty and administrators.
- The comprehensive program review (CPR) document is detailed, well laid out, and outlines NICC's policy and procedure, with references to Iowa code language and HLC requirements. It includes information about the college's program sustainability review; an annual comprehensive data report called the Annual Key Performance Indicator Review (AKPIR) summary sheet of 13 metrics; and the use of Perkins accountability measures that are linked with the CPR data measures.
- Faculty involved in the process shared that the process allowed them to "see how their program fits into the bigger picture" and how "their work connects to the college's overall goals."
- The CTE programs utilize an advisory committee meeting agenda template that is quite extensive. It helps to provide for consistent minutes regarding advisory committee discussions and input regarding matters such as curriculum, equipment, and work-based learning experiences.

During the site interview with CTE administrators and faculty, the DE team recommended that, particularly during the fifth-year comprehensive review, they build in a method to concisely summarize the program evaluation findings and connect them to the annual (AKPIR) reviews. This would help administrators, faculty, advisory board members, and other stakeholders track the program's history and progress toward addressing key findings. It would also improve the consistency, completeness, and usefulness of review documents.

The college should also consider broadening the PET membership so that a variety of college stakeholders can provide input into the process and actions to resolve findings. They might also consider expanding the advisory board role in evaluating a program's effectiveness.

After learning about NICC's comprehensive program review process, the DE team suggested that a flowchart of how the various components of the process (i.e., CPR, AKPIR, program sustainability, and action plans) interconnect and fit into the college's strategic and financial planning would serve as a best practice in the state.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Catalog/State-Approved Review (within CTE Program Evaluations and Timelines)

Months prior to NICC's onsite visit, the DE quality program consultant conducted a manual comparison of NICC's approved CTE programs in the state's web-based database with those provided in their college

catalog (website version). During this comparison, it was found that the college had some minor CTE program name changes, course term changes, and course credit hour changes that had not been submitted into the state's database, but had been updated in the college's current catalog. In all cases where a discrepancy was noted, the college, despite having major staffing changes in the area of curriculum oversight, had either fixed these discrepancies in the state system or updated their catalog to reflect the state approved curriculum. There are no findings with regard to curriculum matching.

Strategic Planning

Community colleges are required to update their strategic plans at least every five years as a guide for the community and its decision-making (Iowa Code section 256.31(4)(a)). The DE team reviewed NICC's most recent strategic plan and interviewed selected staff to ensure compliance with this standard.

The DE team was impressed with NICC's decision to start their current strategic planning process with a comprehensive review of the college's mission, vision, and values. With recent changes within the college, particularly among personnel, this review was critical to form a common knowledge base and buy-in for the process and the resulting plan. They also decided to create a three-year plan, rather than five, to be more nimble. The leadership team drafted the strategic plan at a retreat and then shared it with the college staff at the fall semester's all-college convocation, as well as at various "town halls" at college campuses and centers. These meetings were videotaped so that the conversations could be shared with all employees. In addition, over 29 visits with businesses and the 10 sector boards within the college's service area informed the plan and created more buy-in.

The three-year strategic plan, scheduled for implementation in January 2019, centers on the college's four focus areas of people, consumer, organization, and finances. The college president refers to the plan as "20-20" because it provides a clear vision for moving the college forward. To get the plan operational, work groups have been assigned to plan initiatives and document actions with timetables for the strategic priorities. A Strategic Priority Dashboard will be expanded to serve as a platform to track progress and will be updated both monthly and annually to communicate about initiatives and to "close the loop" on actions.

Some of the key practices that have been implemented as a result of the college's strategic plan include the development of:

- noncredit-to-credit pathways for students who engage in noncredit programs such as CNA and manufacturing and then decide to further their education in a credit program;
- credit for prior learning policies to facilitate noncredit-to-credit and credit for military work;
- competency- and work-based learning curriculum models;
- a distance learning committee to address the growing need for high-quality online programs;
- a robust and comprehensive assessment plan that includes the adoption of a general education assessment tool; and
- a process to integrate work-based learning experiences into CTE programming, highlighted by the mapping of nine criteria ("All Aspects of Industry") from Perkins curriculum.

The success of the town hall videos led to an additional video production in which President Wee rolled out the college's values. In it, he emphasizes the need to push education and training "to the people where they are" and encourages employee feedback - once again demonstrating his commitment to inclusion, equitable opportunities for students, and the college's need for "resiliency" in our changing world.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Physical Plant and Facilities

Each community college in Iowa must present evidence of adequate planning, including a board-approved facilities plan. The community college's plan must meet state and federal requirements as outlined in the state accreditation guide. The DE team reviewed NICC's facilities plan and interviewed the college's facilities staff (Vice President of Finance and Administration, Associate Vice-President of Operations, and the Director of Computer Information Systems) regarding the college's facility planning process and decision-making structure to ensure compliance with this standard.

NICC has thorough, detailed, and data-driven facility planning documents. The college is commended for being good stewards of constituent funds by maximizing the use of current facilities and space and responsibly updating resources to meet the current and future needs of the college. In particular the DE team was impressed by the following items discussed/experienced during the site visit:

- NICC conducts a comprehensive facilities review every five years in which they focus more on efficient utilization of existing facilities and less on new construction. This analysis led to a recently approved bond issue for \$39M that was supported by 84 percent of the voters. The detailed 91-point summary of all college infrastructure needs will in part be handled by the approved bond, while other facility needs will be addressed by other means.
- The Calmar campus consists of well-maintained classrooms, offices, and gathering/studying spaces that meet the academic programming needs of students and demonstrate that the college has been a conscientious steward of 160 acres of beautiful land in Northeast Iowa.
- NICC annually commits about 97 percent of its plant fund for regular maintenance and equipment.
- They provide manuals and trainings on the college's safety processes, including fire, tornado, and lockdown drills at each campus. They have technology in place that allows for remote control of locks at each campus and all classrooms have safety information posted.
- A RAVE notification system sends emails and texts regarding emergencies (weather, intruder).
- They have established an Incident Command team, with leaders from each building, and have conducted emergency practice scenarios with the help of community emergency responders.
- Over 200 staff have completed "Run-Hide-Fight" training and a video is on the website's safety page. Safety updates are provided annually to all staff at Convocation.
- The college utilized the "Etrieve" program for maintenance requests and for resource delivery, setup, and repair. Requests are checked each morning and staff receive updates when their requests are completed. The system also handles the technology (non-hardware) requests.

Overall, the DE team was very impressed with the condition of the facilities, the thorough planning of facility maintenance and improvements, and the responsiveness of the staff to the needs of the college and the community. The team was also thoroughly impressed with the facility director, who has years of experience and a plethora of institutional knowledge. The team discussed the risk of having so much knowledge and expertise wrapped up in one person, so suggested that the college work on a transition plan and perhaps utilize the college's insurance provider to conduct periodic ADA compliance checks in the future.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Quality Faculty Plan

Iowa law establishes the process for community colleges to plan for the hiring and professional development of faculty. Institutional quality faculty plans (QFP) are required to meet the standards of 281-IAC 24.5(5). The DE team reviewed NICC's QFP and interviewed members of the QFP Committee to ensure compliance with this standard.

NICC's QFP was last approved by the college's board in June 2018, and is maintained by a 21-member QFP committee consisting of 14 faculty and seven administrators. The committee includes adjuncts and each member commits to a three-year renewable term of service. The committee meets regularly to review the QFP requirements and make revisions, as needed. The DE team met with the committee to discuss key components of their QFP to ascertain that it meets state standards in that it includes information regarding orientation, mentoring, committee membership composition and appointment, and requires activities, known as continuing education units (CEUs), to ensure that instructors attain specific minimum competencies. In addition, the QFP handbook is a thorough and useful resource for faculty.

The QFP committee members interviewed demonstrated that the faculty had a solid understanding of the plan's requirements and that they are actively involved with faculty development. The QFP also engages adjuncts and concurrent enrollment faculty via clear expectations. An observed identified strength of the integration of the plan was that the competencies listed in the QFP have been mirrored in both the college syllabus and the faculty classroom and student evaluation forms, which affords consistency between expectations and evaluations. In addition, the classroom evaluation of faculty form has been normed for consistency by having all deans evaluate a videotaped session of the same instructional session.

The college utilizes its Etrieve system (a document storage and electronic software system) to record and track faculty professional development plans and activities. Faculty can login and see how many CEUs they have left to complete during a certain timeframe so they can plan accordingly. Most of the CEUs are currently evaluated by seat-time versus other methods, such as the submission of a report or presentation regarding the professional development activity. There is a probationary plan for faculty who do not meet the required CEUs, but if an adjunct or concurrent enrollment instructor do not meet their QFP requirements in a timely manner, they are no longer assigned courses to teach. The QFP committee chair is involved in the resolution/disciplinary decision-making process if a full-time instructor's failure to meet expectations becomes more serious. To avoid these failures, the college has begun to videotape local professional development offerings to make them available for faculty who were not able to attend. In addition, in-house offerings are marketed to faculty in a variety of ways, so there is ample notification of professional development opportunities regardless of the instructional status or location.

The DE team noted that, currently, the QFP committee membership has a CTE versus arts and science faculty imbalance and an overall committee gender imbalance. It was pointed out that this is due to a recent retirement and a position, and that the college is working to re-align the committee with replacement members. However, for the 2017-18 academic year, which is the focus of this accreditation review, the committee met membership requirements, so no finding is noted.

The DE team strongly recommends that NICC align professional development activities (CEUs) with the instructional competencies stated in the QFP, as well as with the college's strategic plan initiatives so that activities are aligned with college values and priorities. The team also suggested that the minutes of the QFP meetings could be more reflective of faculty/stakeholder discussions and the resulting decisions and actions regarding the QFP. During the DE team's report out, it was noted that while the history of the committee's role and activities is important, the college's future and growth opportunities are clearly different than in the past. The QFP committee can, and arguably should, be NICC leaders in the assessment of student learning outcomes, and the future use of college funds and resources in a highly competitive

atmosphere. The QFP has the potential to be a unifying force in the fulfillment of NICC’s strategic plan and its future direction, growth, and sustainability.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Senior Year Plus Programs

There are a variety of requirements for Senior Year Plus (SYP) programs offered to high school students jointly enrolled in Iowa’s community colleges. These requirements are included in Iowa Code chapter 261E. Currently, the DE utilizes the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnership’s (NACEP) accreditation process to ensure compliance with many statutory requirements (legislated Postsecondary Course Audit Committee). The DE team reviewed NICC’s accreditation status with NACEP, interviewed selected staff, and reviewed documentation to ensure compliance with this standard.

NICC’s concurrent enrollment program, High School Partnerships, is overseen by the associate dean of High School Partnerships, who reports to the vice president of Learning and Student Success. Through this program, NICC offers college-level coursework at multiple high schools within its region, with a significant portion of the students enrolled in online courses taught by NICC faculty members.

NICC establishes strong connections with concurrent enrollment instructors at their partner high schools through ongoing professional development activities, peer/mentor classroom observations, and a consistent evaluation process. The college’s commitment to their high school partners goes beyond the concurrent enrollment courses and instructors, motivated by a goal to create academic pathways for students that include coursework, student support services, and work-based learning experiences for students at various grade levels.

NICC’s SYP program was initially accredited by the NACEP in 2012, and will undergo reaccreditation during FY 2019. Overall, the college appears well-positioned to retain their current accreditation status as the DE team found no compliance issues. In fact, they were particularly impressed with the following practices and accomplishments of NICC’s High School Partnerships program:

- There are 25 school districts and over 120 solely concurrent enrollment instructors involved in the program. Over 2,100 high school students are jointly enrolled per semester, resulting in a regional penetration rate of approximately 19 percent. About 50 percent of these are enrolled in CTE.
- About 100 articulated pathways (“CTE Strands”) have been developed to connect high school and college CTE programs. Articulated courses within these pathways are non-transfer level; however, students can receive college credit retroactively after earning a C- or higher in the course, passing its final exam, and successfully completing 12 college credits in NICC’s aligned CTE program.
- NICC’s Career Learning Link Connect program provides secondary students exposure to high-demand industries through work-based learning opportunities that help them develop pathways to career and educational success beyond high school.
- A “Pre-employment Strategies” course is offered at the high schools and students participate in 50-60 events annually, which offer work-based learning opportunities, mock interviews, etc.
- There is a Success Coach in every high school as part of an initiative that was initially funded by a U.S. Department of Labor grant. Due to the program’s success, NICC assumed the funding when the grant expired, which includes funds received through area sector partnerships and regional planning partnerships to help with transportation and other logistical expenses.
- The college provides one-on-one training with new high school concurrent enrollment instructors, who then go through a three-year onboarding process, which includes a mandatory orientation with the appropriate NICC dean, two orientation courses – Faculty 101 and 102 (focused on the

college's LMS, Bright Space), and a series of professional development sessions. Additionally, they are all encouraged participate in new faculty orientation conducted in August and All College Day, held in April and again in the summer.

- District-employed concurrent enrollment instructors undergo the same evaluation process as any NICC-employed adjunct. These evaluations are conducted by NICC deans once per year for the first three years and then on a three-year rotation. These sessions include goal-setting and create a true sense of collegiality.
- All concurrent enrollment instructors are required to use the same course syllabus template as is used by NICC instructors. Every course offered has a Course Guide with learning objectives and competencies that all instructors are required to follow.

The associate dean of the High School Partnerships has established strong relationships with high school counselors to ensure that jointly enrolled students receive access to the same support services and processes (registration, placement testing, etc.) as all NICC students. In fact, all high school students receive face-to-face orientation/registration sessions in the spring of each year where they learn about all of the resources and services available to them. NICC has invested heavily in this student population in an effort to create academic pathways for them that lead to future enrollment at the college or well-trained employees to directly enter the region's workforce.

Finding: No compliance issues noted.

Compliance with Non-Accreditation State or Federal Requirements

Finding: No non-accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Evaluation Team Recommendation

The Iowa Department of Education's community college accreditation team recommends continued accreditation for Northeast Iowa Community College.

A state interim accreditation evaluation will be conducted in FY 2024 (i.e., Academic Year 2023-2024).