

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**ACCREDITATION REPORT FOR THE IOWA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**

**Action Requested:** Receive the accreditation report for the Iowa School for the Deaf.

**Executive Summary:** The Iowa School for the Deaf (1) prepared a readiness assessment that addressed the standards for accreditation defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had a Quality Assurance Review on-site visit by consultant-evaluators. The Iowa School for the Deaf received Accreditation on Advisement which means that ISD is accredited with additional reporting that must be completed during the next five-year period. A satisfactory review during the next five-year period can lead to the removal of the accreditation on advisement designation.

This accreditation report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to provide “educational excellence and impact.”

**Background:**

- ◇ **Description.** “Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. The accreditation process is also known in terms of its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education. Accreditation is a set of rigorous protocols and research-based processes for evaluating an institution’s organizational effectiveness. It examines the whole institution – the programs, the cultural context, the community of stakeholders – to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of students.”<sup>2</sup>
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** AdvancED is an accrediting body for elementary and secondary institutions. The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.
- ◇ **Review Process.** The Quality Assurance Review prepared by the Iowa School for the Deaf addressed the seven AdvancED accreditation standards – vision and purpose; governance and leadership; teaching and learning; documenting and using results; resources and support systems; stakeholder communications and relationships; and commitment to continuous improvement.
- ◇ **Purpose of Accreditation.** An institution that is accredited by an accrediting body is recognized by its peers as having met state and national standards for its development and evaluation.
- ◇ **On-Site Team Report.** In April 2011, the visiting team determined that the Iowa School for the Deaf met the standards required for accreditation although specific required actions for improvement were identified. Standard 4 – Documenting and Using Results – was not met; ISD earned the overall assessment level of “Emerging” for this standard.

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<sup>2</sup> AdvancED.

◇ Sample Commendations Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “Iowa School for the Deaf provides commitment to meeting the individualized needs of students with highly qualified teachers, interpreters, low student-teacher ratios, and a safe and nurturing environment.
- ☑ Students’ access to multiple forms of communication provides a productive learning environment. School staff offer ongoing opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing students to communicate through sign language, electronic communication systems, and writing.
- ☑ Parents and students described the school as a ‘second family’ based on nurturing staff and a welcoming environment. Teachers and support staff are experienced in serving the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students. They are involved in continuous learning about multiple disabilities.
- ☑ Skilled interpreters are available to students at all times in the classrooms, extra-curricular activities, social activities, and in the dormitories. The library, health care offices, cafeteria, and bus drivers have skills to communicate with students. Electronic systems provide additional means for communication.
- ☑ Staff members exhibit a collaborative nature and demonstrate support for each other. Staff members conveyed a sense of loyalty to the school and students.
- ☑ Collaboration among staff members maximizes the effectiveness of delivering services to students in the classroom and outside of the school day. As teachers and support staff connect knowledge and skills, instructional delivery and student achievement is enhanced.”

◇ Required Actions for Improvement.

- ☑ “Develop a commitment from stakeholder groups (i.e., staff, administration, Board, parents) to a shared purpose and direction including clearly defined expectations for student programming.
  - ⊗ Although most stakeholders expressed support for the mission of the school, there was significant variance about how to continually improve. Several parents and teachers conveyed enthusiasm for renewing commitment to the Career Center programs and for increasing mainstreaming into a general school. Most interviewees believed there is a need to prioritize for the future.
  - ⊗ When many stakeholders have an opportunity to share in the process of developing the vision, mission, and action plan, there is an increase of commitment to reaching goals. In addition, groups developing goals have an increased appreciation and respect for the wide range of priorities present among teachers, leaders, parents, and students.
- ☑ Evaluate resource allocations to determine if instructional and non-instructional expenditures, including facilities, reflect the continuous improvement goals of the school. The school's vision, mission, and time-bound action plan should guide allocation of personnel, facilities, materials and equipment, and programming.
  - ⊗ Budget cuts have resulted in reduced programming. Leaders believe it will be necessary to make additional adjustments due to lack of finances. According to documents and interviews, there has been minimal involvement of stakeholders beyond a small team of leaders in establishing priorities. A long-range plan for facilities and programming was not evident.

- ⊗ In order to provide a shared understanding and commitment to goals, the allocation of resources must be based on prioritized needs with input from multiple stakeholders. Specificity in short and long range goals is essential to align resources with improvement efforts. Clearly defined objectives and strategies with specific timeframes allow the school to allocate resources for optimal student achievement.
- ☑ Determine appropriate systems for assessing and communicating academic progress for all students.
  - ⊗ Abundant test data are available; however, there is not a clear and understandable tool for communicating progress beyond individualized meetings. The Annual Progress Report refers to student gains in some grades. It is an attractive publication that could provide more specific achievement information. Staff members communicated a commitment to student achievement without a shared understanding of how to measure and report progress to others. Administrators and teachers spoke about various problems related to assessing, documenting, and communicating progress for special students.
  - ⊗ An effective academic monitoring system should include standardized and non-standardized measures of achievement that can be reported to external stakeholders. Trend-line data provide a means for documenting improvement efforts with comparative data and demonstrating academic achievement.”
- ◇ Accreditation Status. In May 2011, AdvancEd awarded Accreditation on Advisement to the Iowa School for the Deaf. This will require additional reporting during the next five-year period. The additional reporting is related to continuing to systematize the database of student progress and further define student progress monitoring. Upon completion of the required actions for improvement, the designation of accreditation on advisement will be removed.

The following next steps were identified for the Iowa School for the Deaf:

- ☑ “Review and discuss the findings from the accreditation report with all stakeholders.
- ☑ Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school.
- ☑ Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
- ☑ Use the report to guide and strengthen the school’s efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
- ☑ Submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
- ☑ Continue to meet the AdvancEd accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.”