

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

UPDATE ON NORTHEAST REGIONAL ACADEMY

Action Requested: Receive the presentation.

Executive Summary: Superintendent Steve Gettel, Regional Director Jay Colsch, and Director of Extended Learning Susan Rolinger will provide an update on the implementation of the Northeast Regional Academy (NERA) pilot project in the Charles City Community School District.

The Leadership Team for Deaf and Blind continues to meet to address major issues related to activities outlined in the planning tool adopted in August 2014. The NERA Planning Committee has responsibility for the majority of tasks related to establishing the Academy. During the past nine months, efforts have focused on interagency agreement approvals, development of a leadership team, identification of students requiring instructional services, staff recruitment, building relationships with stakeholders (including parents, local school district administrators/staff, administrators/staff from AEA 267 and Keystone AEA), and obtaining funding to support the NERA.

1. Developing Leadership and Infrastructure

- An intergovernmental agreement between the Board of Regents, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Iowa Department of Public Health established the Executive Team to provide statewide oversight to ensure efficient delivery of statewide services for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- An agreement for the management and operation of the NERA was approved by the Board of Regents and Charles Community School District.
- An agreement to establish a consortium to jointly administer an instructional program at the NERA was approved by the Board of Regents and the Charles City Community School District.
- A regional director (Jay Colsch) was hired to supervise NERA staff and the Director of Extended Learning programs.

Next Steps. The Planning Committee will continue to use the planning tool and feedback from constituents to inform decisions related to the development and implementation of NERA.

2. Identification of Students and Instructional Services

- Data from the current school year indicate there are 27 students with visual impairments and 33 students with hearing impairments living within the NERA service area. Approximately 10-30% of those students would benefit from intensive, direct instruction provided by NERA.
- AEA and IESBVI itinerant teachers and staff have indicated the need to provide supplemental instruction for preschool deaf/hard of hearing students, instruction in communication and literacy for early elementary deaf/hard of hearing students, extended school year services, summer literacy programs, extended learning opportunities with emphasis on the expanded core curriculum, and facilitation of professional learning communities for teachers who work with deaf or blind students.

- In collaboration with AEA and IESBVI teachers, there have been six extended learning opportunities for elementary age students in the 267/Keystone AEA regions, including an on-going mentoring program for deaf and hard of hearing students, family literacy program, weekend science event, and three other social/collaborative learning events related to the expanded core curriculum.
- Feedback has indicated the need for a teacher of the deaf to develop instructional programs to serve unmet needs of deaf/hard of hearing students in the Academy region.

Next steps. As requested by teachers and parents, the NERA leadership team will continue to identify unmet service needs and explore the use of distance learning to provide direct instruction from the Charles City location to students in the region.

3. Developing Relationships and Promoting the Academy

- The regional director met with the school district staff and or the parents of 10 students who made inquiries about the Academy.
- The regional director and the director of extended learning met with AEA 267 and Keystone AEA special education administrators and staff (including vision liaisons and teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired) to gather information about unmet educational needs of students from the region and to solicit support for the NERA.

Next Steps. The team will continue to meet with parents and stakeholders to clarify the purpose of the Academy, develop stronger relationships with ISD administration, and distribute information about the Academy to legislators.

4. Staff Recruitment

- An interpreter was hired in August 2015 to provide services to an elementary students from the Charles City Community School District.
- Attempts to recruit a teacher of the deaf and a teacher of the visually impaired have been on-going. There have been no applications from teachers of the visually impaired. There have been five applications from teachers of the deaf.
- One interview for the teacher of the deaf position occurred on December 21, 2015; the second interview will occur on January 11, 2016.

Next Steps. The human resources staff from ISD and IBSSS will continue to recruit Academy staff based on referrals and student needs during the remainder of the 2015-2016 school year and on projected enrollment for the 2016-2017 school year.

5. Funding

- ISD/IBSSS worked with BOR state relations officers to inform the 2015 legislature of the need for additional funding for the Academy.
- The Iowa Department of Education will provide up to \$300,000 in Part B grant funds to support the operation of the NERA for FY 2016 through FY 2018.
- ISD/IBSSS requested \$241,800 in FY 2017 to support the NERA operation.

Next Steps. The Planning Committee will continue to provide information to the legislature and constituents about the need for a state appropriation for the Academy. Use of Part B grant funds for FY 2016 will be analyzed and reported to the Iowa Department of Education at the end of the school year.