

NEBRASKA CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT EXTERNAL REPORT

(Revised, July, 2022)



Prepared For:	Wheeler Central Public Schools
Head Administrator:	Daniel Kluver
Dates of Visit:	March 18-20, 2024



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Introduction and Purpose of the Visit

92 NAC 10 "Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Nebraska Schools"

Section 009 of Rule 10 describes Continuous Improvement as, "A systematic on-going process guides planning, implementation, and evaluation and renewal of continuous school improvement activities to meet local and statewide goals and priorities. The school improvement process focuses on improving student learning. The process includes a periodic review by visiting educators who provide consultation to the local school/community in continued accomplishment of plans and goals."

Previous External Visit

The previous External Visit for Wheeler Central Public Schools was held on April 30-May 1, 2019 as part of the external visit for the Northern Tier Schools (NTS) Interlocal, including Boyd County, Stuart, Summerland, Verdigre and Wheeler Central. Members of the NTS combined their data to determine the area of greatest student achievement need. Commendations and recommendations from the 2019 accreditation visit can be found below.

Commendations

- The district has an active, well sustained CIP process that includes staff involvement "across the board".
- The monthly CIP meetings help all staff members stay current and new staff members get up to speed quickly. New staff are nurtured and encouraged to fully participate right from the start
- There are good "drivers" within the building. They are passionate but not overbearing. They provided guidance, data, etc. but also support autonomy. Other staff members are good "passengers"; it takes both!
- There is good accountability for CIP within the building. Everyone is actively involved in what needs to be done.
- All students knew of the vocabulary goal, and the depth of their participation and learning was strong. They gave good examples of what they were doing in the classroom.

Recommendations

- Continue with the current process, as you either continue to work on your vocabulary goal or select a new goal. Your process is your hallmark.

- Vocabulary practices and assessment are well established. Given that, the district needs to determine if they will stay with vocabulary knowledge as their goal or if they will select a new goal.

Preparation for the External Visit

External team leader Deb Paulman, met with the Wheeler Central Continuous Improvement Committee (led by Principal, Makayla Reiter) initially on January 3, and again on February 19, and March 5, 2024. These pre-visit meetings served to clarify the preparatory work for the external team and the school district.

Evidence for the on-site review was organized using the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) templates that are available to host schools and linked in a Google folder accessible to both the host site and the external team members. Wheeler Central's website, facebook page, NEP/AQuESST data and access to internal files also provided valuable information for the visit. Prior to the visit members of the External Team reviewed the Action Plan and School Profile and met for an orientation of expectations.

Purpose of the External Visit

In Nebraska, a network of professional peers volunteer to serve on External Teams. Members of the External Team commit significant preparatory as well as 2-3 days of on-site External Visit time to review the documentation and continuous improvement efforts of the school system and to affirm compliance with Section 009 of Rule 10. External Visits also provide meaningful feedback that can be used to acknowledge and inform progress on identified improvement goals.

External Visitation Team

The responsibilities of the External Team include:

- 1) Review school system evidence of Continuous Improvement.
- 2) Observe educational services provided by the school system.
- 3) Assess the progress and effectiveness of the Action Plan.
- 4) Provide feedback for continued improvement.

Peer review is a common strategy for supporting school and teacher improvement. Research suggests the potential value in peer review as a part of larger school improvement initiatives. Of particular note, some suggest that peer reviews may reduce “top-down” accountability mindsets and generate greater practitioner-driven innovations. Several states utilize peer review as part of their larger school quality, accountability, or accreditation processes, though peer review is rarely linked to a broader CI process. *(Data Literacy Workbook, Hanover Research, February 2022)*

Serving as an External Visit volunteer is an important responsibility. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) appreciates the leadership skills and peer collegiality of educators throughout the state that volunteer for this role.

External Team Roster

	Name	Position	Phone	Email
Team Leader	Deb Paulman	Retired educator	308-386-8237	debsou@gmail.com
Member	Jeff McQuistan	ESU 17 Staff Development Director; CIP Specialist	402-387-2520	jmcquistan@esu17.org
Member	Lane Swedberg	ESU 16 Staff Development Curriculum Specialist	308-534-2416	lswedberg@esusixteen.org

Onsite Agenda

The On-Site Visit was scheduled for 2½ days from March 18-20, 2024. Prior to the visit Deb Paulman, External Team Lead met via Zoom with the Wheeler Central CIP team to identify focus groups and establish a general timeline for the visit. The External Team participated in an Orientation Meeting prior to the visit to discuss responsibilities and to plan for the review of the Action Plan and School Profile.

Wheeler Central External Visit Agenda - March 18-20, 2024

March 18 - Monday	
Northern Tier Opening Presentations in O'Neill	
4:00-5:00	External Team Arrival; External Teamwork Time
5:00-6:00	Meet and Greet NECC-O'Neill Campus
6:00-7:00	Dinner
7:00-8:00	Northern Tier Opening Presentation
8:00-9:00	Opening Presentations – Host School Boyd Co/Wheeler Central
March 19 - Tuesday	
7:40-8:30	Travel to WC
8:30-8:45	External team arrives at school; Coffee/Light Breakfast
8:45-9:15	CIP Team Interview
9:15-10:45	Facility Tour/Classroom Visits
10:45-11:20	High School Staff Interview
11:20-12:00	Elementary School Staff Interview
12:00-12:45	Lunch
12:45-1:30	Student Interviews

1:30-2:15	Support Staff Interview
2:30-3:15	Parent Interview
3:15-3:30	Wrap-Up
3:30-5:00	External Team Drive Time and NTS Exit Report Work
6:00-7:00	Dinner on their own
March 20 - Wednesday	
7:45-8:15	Travel to WC
8:15-8:45	External team arrives at school; Coffee/Light Breakfast
8:45-9:45	External Teamwork Time
9:45-10:30	District Administration Interview
10:30-11:45	External Teamwork Time
11:45-12:15	Exit Presentation

Review of Continuous Improvement Process

NAC 92 Chapter 10


009.01A The school system develops and implements a continuous school improvement process to promote quality learning for all students. This process includes procedures and strategies to address quality learning, equity, and accountability.





The Wheeler Central continuous improvement cycle from 2019 to 2024 has been fraught with challenges. The school and surrounding communities have been recovering from a catastrophic flood in 2019, the impacts of the Covid pandemic in 2019-20 and the financial/emotional fallout resulting from a community bank closure. It would be insensitive and irresponsible not to acknowledge the impact of these kinds of events on the communities and the school district. The current administration and continuous improvement leadership team demonstrate a strong commitment to Wheeler Central's continuous improvement process. The team and district leadership have gone to great lengths to establish some of the key foundational pieces important to fully restoring their ongoing improvement work, including:



- Establishing the necessary committee structures to distribute leadership/ownership of their various initiatives. (CIP, ILCD, MTSS, PBIS).
- Building time in the district schedule for monthly CIP meetings with the entire staff.
- Providing professional development critical to addressing their continuous improvement goal.
- Requiring all staff to develop a "classroom level" action plan in support of the district vocabulary/writing goal.

AQuESTT Tenets

The following evidence highlights Wheeler Central Public School's support of the state's AQuESTT accountability system:

	<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Wheeler Central has a strong culture of shared leadership. They have an established committee structure that effectively distributes the work of MTSS, CIP, MTSS, PBIS and ILCD.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the district moves into the next cycle of continuous improvement, school leadership may want to revisit the mission statement to ensure that it represents the current sensibilities around who Wheeler Central school district is, and what they're trying to accomplish.
	<p>Educational Opportunities and Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zearn & CKLA high quality instructional materials 1:1 Technology 7-12 Nutrition, Health, Early Learning and Daycare provided Guidance Counselor, FFA, FCS Enrichment and Interventions (WIN, Bronco Time) MTSS
	<p>Transitions</p> <p>Wheeler Central has considered the transition needs of students at various junctures in their academic career. Events to support transition include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schoolwide Back to School Bash Preschool Open House Kindergarten Roundup 6th grade orientation to Middle School New Student Orientation College visits, career exploration lessons, ASVAB career activities
	<p>Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Title I, Special Education, Homework Club, Wellness Program Family Literacy Night, P/T Conferences, Positive Postcards Parent Survey
	<p>Educator Effectiveness</p> <p>Professional Development opportunities for staff are coordinated through ESU 8 and/or the NTS support structure. Recent PD includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marzano training (2022) MTSS

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PBIS ● LETRs ● Write Tools ● New ELA/Math curriculum implementation support <p>Other structures that support educator effectiveness include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Literacy Council ● Counselors Cadre ● Title I Annual Meeting ● Wheeler Central's Framework of Professional Practice
	<p>Student Achievement and Growth</p> <p>Wheeler Central has established the components of a balanced assessment system that includes achievement, perceptual and demographic data. Data sources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NEP demographic and achievement data ● Student wellness data sources (SAEBRS) ● MAP, Acadience, GOLD, ELPA, PELI to monitor student learning/readiness ● Perceptual data collection using the NDE resource materials
	<p>Postsecondary, Career, and Civic Readiness</p> <p>In discussions with Focus Groups it was clear that the community and the school are mutually supportive. Students are involved in a variety of community service projects and events.</p> <p>Career Readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work release ● Junior High Careers Unit ● Middle School Enrichment Day ● Education Quest Career Day ● 8th grade Campus visit ● Pre-ACT, PSAT, ASVAB <p>Civic Readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● County Government Day ● Citizenship Test ● Mock Election ● Student Council ● Community Service Projects

009.01A1 Review and update of the mission and vision statements.

The following Mission Statement and Belief Statements are included in the Wheeler Central Public Schools 2023-2024 Student Handbook on page 6:

MISSION STATEMENT

Whereas, to fulfill the mission of the Wheeler Central Public Schools, it is essential to understanding that all is defined to be students, administrators, staff, family, and community members; therefore, the mission of the Wheeler Central Public Schools in partnership with all is to provide positive, lifelong learning

BELIEF STATEMENTS

The following belief statements were developed for the Wheeler Central Public Schools:

1. Learning is a lifelong process for all.
2. High expectations for all produce success at all levels.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate and apply knowledge to basic skills.
4. All people will be treated with respect in a safe, positive learning environment.
5. Active participation for learning and behavior is the responsibility of all and is essential to the success of the educational process.

An updated Mission and Vision Statement was shared during the opening presentation on March 18, 2024:

Mission and Vision

Wheeler Central values education and provides many opportunities in a modern facility with access to technology and numerous resources; while recognizing the community challenges of quality housing and employment opportunities. Learners Today, Leaders Tomorrow

009.01A2 Collection and analysis of data about student performance, demographics, learning climate, and former high school students.

Opening Presentation

Wheeler Central is the only school within the 576 square miles of Wheeler County, NE. The county consists of ranches, feedlots, poultry operations, and other agriculturally rooted businesses. Their students are heavily involved in 4-H, FFA, junior livestock programs, and rodeo competitions. Even though their students are involved in many out of school activities, their students are also very competitive in athletics within and outside of their school. All in all, their students are well-rounded with participation in academics, athletics, and other community activities.

Demographics

The following student demographic data is included in the Nebraska Education Profile, the district's AQuESTT Report and/or was highlighted during the opening presentation:

Demographic Categories	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
(PK-12) Student Enrollment	99	105	106	114	127
Special Education	8	15		20	33
High Ability Learners	26.58%	21.95%	20.00%	21.51%	18.27%
Free and Reduced	53.54%	42.86%	33.96%	21.05%	24.41%
English Learners	3	3	2	4	2
White	90	101	100	110	120
Black or African American	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	9	4	6	4	7
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
Two or More Races	0	0	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0
Attendance Rate	95.95%	96.44%	98.93%	94.68%	94.4%
Highly Mobile	17.35%	2.56%	4.67%	4.81%	5.41%
Graduation Rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Dropout Rate	*	*	*	*	*

Student Performance

Wheeler Central Public Schools supports 127 students and 20 teachers. The district has received a classification of “Good” every year since the 2019-2020 school year. The following table shows the district's level of proficiency (Advanced/On Track or combined) on the NSCAS for grades 3-8:

Data Years	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science
2022-2023	46%	48%	76%
2021-2022	33%	40%	*
2018-2019	44%	51%	*

The following table shows the data provided by the district on their proficiency on the ACT:

Data Years	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science
2022-2023	40%	20%	40%
2021-2022	0%	20%	20%
2020-2021	33%	50%	83%
2018-2019	33%	33%	50%

Learning Climate

Stakeholder feedback was collected throughout the cycle using the NDE Stakeholder Surveys administered to students, parents, teachers and support staff during the spring of 2023. The following were themes that surfaced as the highest rated:

- Safety
- Attendance
- Support for Students

The following were the lowest-rated themes:

- Respect/Relationships/Wellness
- Facility & Maintenance

The following themes had mixed responses:

- Student Opportunities & Programs
- School Rules/Behavior

Themes

Focus Group Interviews

The external team had an opportunity to engage in several Focus Group interviews including 16 students, 2 administrators, 20 educators and 9 community stakeholders. The following themes came from those interviews:

STRENGTHS

- “Family” and “Community” were words mentioned consistently in each focus group interview to describe the school.
- Universal support for others is provided throughout the school, including educators, support staff, administrators and community members.
- Meaningful opportunities are provided for parents, families and community members to be involved with the school.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Continue to ensure productive struggle opportunities for students in the classroom. Students expressed that this is how they know they are learning.
- Provide appropriate training and support for all educators and support staff. Sometimes paraeducators are working with students who have the most challenges, and they may need additional support. Educators who are implementing new high quality instructional resources may need additional implementation support from the ESU.

Classroom Visits

The external team spent a combined total of 1 hour and 40 minutes visiting classrooms, averaging approximately 9 minutes per classroom visit. A total of 13 classroom visits were conducted, including general classroom, WIN time, and special education support settings.

The district identified these concepts as the framework for the classroom visits:

- Positive Relationships
- Student Engagement Tools
- Options to Respond
- Opportunities to Respond
- Group Participation
- Positive Descriptive Feedback

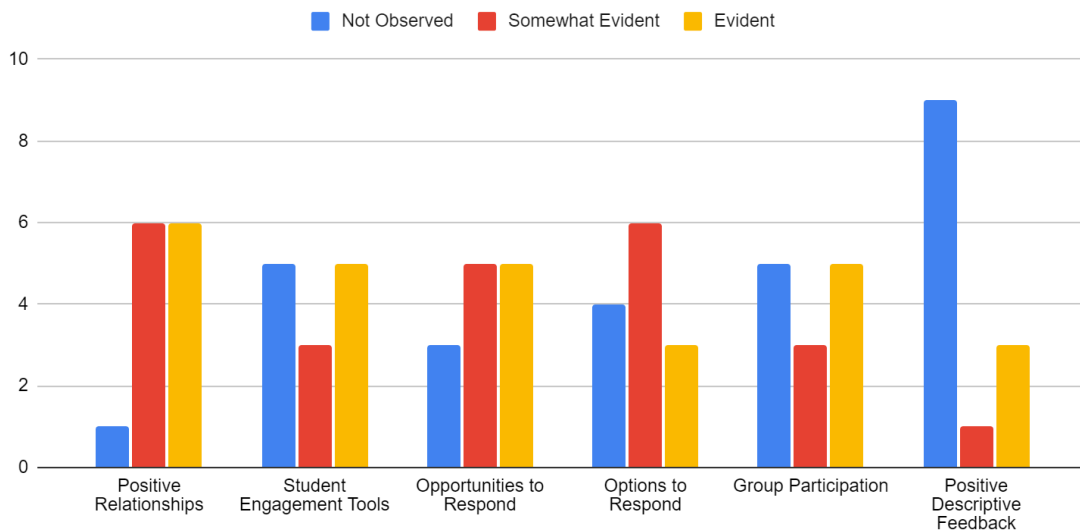
The following indicators were documented by the team as occurring in approximately 70% or more of the classrooms (“Evident” or “Somewhat Evident”):

- Positive Relationships
- Opportunities to Respond

The following indicators were documented as occurring in less than 40% of the classrooms. NOTE: this does not mean that they do not occur at all, only that they did not occur during the classroom visits.

- Positive Descriptive Feedback (It is noted that this particular strategy has just recently been implemented and is logically at a “beginning” level of implementation.)

The following visualizations summarizing the classroom visits were shared during the exit presentation.



Review of Progress on Continuous Improvement Goals

009.01A3 Selection of improvement goals. At least one goal is directed toward improving student academic achievement

The district has identified the following improvement goal: All students will improve vocabulary knowledge in each content area with an emphasis in writing. This goal was selected based on the following support data: NSCAS/NSCAS Growth, NWEA MAP, formative assessments, and teacher recommendations.

Commendations:

- Across the board, K-12 teacher commitment to integration of vocabulary instruction in their classrooms.
- Classroom level action planning ensures a measure of intentionality and accountability for teacher implementation of the strategies presented in their vocabulary based professional learning. i.e. Marzano 6 Steps to Effective Vocabulary Instruction, Anita Archer Vocabulary Training
- Staff identified the importance of learning vocabulary in context and expanded their vocabulary goal to include a writing component in 2021.
- The adoption and implementation of high quality instructional materials is one of the most impactful vocabulary supports that the district has put in place.

Recommendations:

- The district has had a vocabulary goal for the last two improvement cycles (10 years). It will be important to use all of the various data sources available to the school to identify the next school improvement goal/s.

009.01A4 Development and implementation of an improvement plan which includes procedures, strategies, actions to achieve goals, and an aligned professional development plan.

009.01A5 Evaluation of progress toward improvement goals.

[Wheeler Central Public Schools District Action Plan](#) (PDF)

Commendations:

- There is significant classroom level accountability for implementation of the vocabulary goal, i.e. classroom level action planning.
- District staff access the MAPS ELA vocabulary subtest scores to monitor progress on their vocabulary goal.
- The district works in partnership with ESU 8 staff to monitor classroom implementation of the vocabulary goal and associated vocabulary strategies with periodic fidelity checks.

Recommendations:

- Vocabulary strategies are a well established part of classroom routines that district staff should continue in subsequent improvement cycles. A deep dive into multiple data sources will help the district surface their next improvement focus.
- Lean into the ESU 8 staff to assist with the data dive as well as identification of supporting professional development.
- Identify implementation processes and data sources (think formative, summative, walkthroughs, etc) that will help measure the impact of identified professional development efforts on the next improvement goals.

Summary

The district is commended on the following:

- **All stakeholders know the district goal.** Teachers, students, support staff and parents are all aware that students are working on improving vocabulary and/or writing skills. When students were asked why they were working on improving their vocabulary, they indicated that it would help them to be more professional and knowledgeable when they are adults working in the real world.
- **CIP meetings are conducted with all staff.** Staff are highly involved in the CIP process, which includes reviewing, discussing and using student performance data (MAP Growth, NSCAS, diagnostic, progress monitoring) on a regular basis in order to make educational decisions at the classroom level. Teacher “Action Plans” also bring CIP to the classroom level.
- **Teachers provide academic support for students as necessary and upon student request.** Bronco Time, WIN and Homework Club are formal structures to address gaps and provide academic support and enrichment opportunities for students. Additionally, students commented that teachers will help them before/after school, and even during the summer when assistance is requested.
- **Leadership is the driving force behind productive continuous improvement.** Leadership happens at different levels. The superintendent and principal are both highly involved in the CIP process and provide time, resources and opportunities for educators to be successful. The CIP Team, composed of the principal and five representative educators, is also essential in organizing and displaying data, facilitating data analysis discussions, brainstorming, and decision making, as well as supporting peers from a collegial position.

The following recommendations are provided to guide district leadership in the next improvement cycle:


- **Expand and detail the district level action plan documentation.**
Classroom level action plans exist under the umbrella of the district action

plan. As the district begins a new cycle of improvement it will be important to identify goal/s, clarify expected and incremental progress, and identify the data sources that can inform and monitor progress over time. These components formalized and codified into a district level action plan will be an important next step in strengthening the Wheeler Central improvement work.

- **Build staff capacity to use data as a tool in both classroom level and district level continuous improvement work.** As noted the district has a solid foundation of regular MAPS Growth, NSCAS, diagnostic, progress monitoring review. Leadership and staff are poised to take the next steps in building their data literacy skill sets. The district has keyed in on growth (which was important post-Covid). The questions for the district going forward are how can growth AND proficiency be addressed and what is the intersection of multiple measures of data that can inform instructional/improvement efforts to move the “proficiency needle”? There are a number of resources that can support these next steps, including ESU 8 support, Victoria Bernhardt materials, as well as some of the Hanover Data Literacy materials.
- **Take your time** to thoughtfully consider the implications of district data and the professional learning that will help teachers help students. Continuous improvement is a five year cycle for a reason...it takes time and measured intentionality to continue to make a difference in children's learning.

Additional Considerations:

- The current **Mission/Vision Statement** should be reviewed as the district enters a new cycle. The statement itself should limit its focus to “who we are and what we are aspiring to be” and should create a sense of unity and collective energy for all stakeholders. Here is a current resource that explains the essential components of effective Mission/Vision statements: [How to Write School Mission and Vision Statements | Marymount University](#)
- The NDE **Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA)** is a very informative and highly-recommended self-assessment tool. The seven tenets are broken down into 76 individual dimensions that can bring awareness to areas that may have not been on the district's radar, in addition to

gaining a better understanding of AQuESTT.  CNA 2.0 (You are invited to make a copy.)

- The NDE is currently finalizing a **Graduate Survey** that can provide another lens from which to assess school district operations, culture, climate and impact. This survey may be available as early as Fall 2024.

1. Finalize the report and download as a PDF.
2. Submit the PDF, including the Improvement/ Action Plan, via email to the school system and the NDE at: nde.accreditation@nebraska.gov

