



## College Community School District

The College Community School District (CCSD) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has a long history of embracing the importance of early learning education, providing high quality preschool programs for three and four-year olds. A long-standing pattern of data suggests that participation in the district's voluntary preschool programs and daycare leads to higher achievement and engagement from both students and their families, especially as they transition to kindergarten. CCSD achieved AASA Lighthouse District status for the detailed and highly successful Early Learning programs it offers.

CCSD emphasizes eight key factors that ensure the quality and success of its early learning initiatives. First, this district includes early learning goals in its strategic plan as well as school improvement plans. It articulates clear metrics for monitoring the effects of its early learning programs throughout the school year. To realize these goals, the district is actively engaged in cross-institutional partnerships to support providers and connect the school district to early learning providers. These range from participation in Early Childhood Iowa and the Iowa Childcare Resource and Referral system to collaborations with a range of local and state-level agencies and organizations actively engaged in promoting early childhood education.

Early learning standards are part of the overall district curriculum plan and are clearly articulated in the K-12 system. The district bases this plan on the Iowa Early Learning Standards, including identification of power standards and supporting standards to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum for its youngest learners. To ensure maximum impact of these programs, the district offers professional development for all programs (public and/or private) to support quality and continuous improvement. Cross-institutional partners include the Grant Wood Area Education Agency, Iowa State University, and the Iowa and National Associations for the Education of the Young Child.

Like all AASA Lighthouse Districts, CCSD emphasizes diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment to monitor and ensure early learners' progress and program effectiveness. This approach includes use of the Iowa Department of Education's Self-Assessment of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Implementation (SAMI), the Teaching Pyramid Tool (TPOT) for pre-school classrooms, and literacy instructional and procedural fidelity checks to reinforce read aloud effectiveness, teacher delivery, and student interaction.

Extensive outreach to all families of pre-school students fosters relationships, helps to develop collaborative partnerships with families, and cultivates parents as teachers. Services range from home visits, Early Childhood Family Involvement Surveys, and active involvement of parents in conferences and school activities. Additionally, a universal screener for social-emotional skills is completed at the start of the school year with follow-up responses to student needs as well as concerns and questions expressed by parents.

Equity is another key priority in the district's approach to early childhood education. The district has a comprehensive plan to ensure that high-quality learning experiences are available to all learners, regardless of their socio-economic status, religion, race, gender, or disability. Once again, this Lighthouse District makes extensive use of cross-institutional partnerships to promote equity, including an Alternative Kindergarten program as part of the community college's early childhood programming, direct services in Section-8 voucher-eligible housing developments, and work with faith groups, including the All God's Children Preschool (an outreach ministry of the Shueyville United Methodist Church). A major equity commitment is to ensure that all children have access to effective early childhood learning, including the goal of expanding available daycare slots throughout the district.

Communication with stakeholders is another Lighthouse District priority area. CCSD employs a strong communication process to provide caregivers with practical strategies, information, and support. Efforts in this area include the use of a range of media and platforms to communicate information to pre-school parents and families, use of a centralized messaging system (Brightwheel) to communicate families, staff, and community members, and a wide range of support services (e.g., translation services, integration of early childhood education into the district's PBIS system, and health, safety, medical, as well as dental services). An Early Childhood Family Involvement Survey reinforces the monitoring of a welcoming school climate, family educator communication, parent family knowledge and confidence, and parent education opportunities.

Finally, CCSD system leaders create and expand awareness of the need for early learning programs, advocating for funding at local and state levels. Outreach efforts include membership in the Urban Education Network, reports to the Community College School Board regarding strengths and challenges in early childhood programming, and a range of state-funded relief grants as well as partnerships involving College Community Schools and Head Start.