

Positive news following Clinton schools site visit

By Brenden West Assistant Editor | Posted: Friday, January 30, 2015 6:00 am



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Brenden West/Clinton Herald Clinton Schools Superintendent Deb Olson (left) and Curriculum Director John Jorgenson listen to 12 Iowa Department of Education officials as they review the district's accreditation Thursday.

CLINTON — The results are early, but the rough draft of the Iowa Department of Education's accreditation report for the Clinton Community School District, indicates the district is heading in the right direction.

The report notes that declining enrollment has had a negative impact on public perception. Officials recommend the district take their positive review of Clinton Schools and run with it.

"It's a very well-run machine," said Holly Barnes, an Iowa Department of Education school improvement consultant. "I think they're doing a very good job."

Accreditation officials have been in Clinton since Monday. They spent three days observing district facilities and interviewing staff, students and the general public about several areas of performance. On Thursday, 12 state officials met with CCSD administrators to discuss the findings.

Among the district's highlights are leadership visibility, embraced educational approaches like Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and collaboration amongst students, staff and the community to groom a positive environment. Four years ago, the department visited Clinton Schools. State officials said this year that the district has improved in nearly all areas over that span.

"They're doing so many great things," Barnes said. "There's buy-in from everybody and it's not 'your kids and my kids.' It's 'our kids.' Everybody is taking ownership and educating 'our kids.'"

She added that district supporters should be "pleased" with the findings, stating it's important that the public be aware of progress being made locally.

The review came with several recommendations, including enhancing the district's approach to marketing. State officials said marketing is one reason why there are "negative perceptions" of the district from various segments of the local community.

CCSD Superintendent Deb Olson said Thursday's review and recommendations provided good feedback for her to find areas of improvement. Admittedly, she said the process was stressful, since outside, state-level experts are taking a hard look at the district.

But Thursday served as confirmation to Olson that Clinton Schools are on the right track.

"It's the opportunity to have an outside source that's not connected physically with what you do on a day-to-day basis and give you viewpoints," Olson said. "It gives us another lens on what we do.

"I think it's all good. It's good feedback."

Barnes noted the findings were very preliminary, and that it would take several months before a finalized report could be presented. However, nothing in the draft indicated positive vibes expressed on Thursday would drastically change.

If school officials needed validation, though, Barnes said the organization's findings certainly provide it.

"I was really, really pleased with what we heard, the people we talked to and the things that we saw," she said. "This community has a lot to be proud of. They really do."

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