

A Case Study of

# College Community School District

Cedar Rapids Prairie, Iowa



**LEARNING** Student-Centered  
**2025** Equity-Focused  
Future-Driven  
Education



# An Introduction to the Learning 2025 Case Studies Series

*AASA Learning 2025: Student-Centered, Equity-Focused, Future-Driven Education* is a movement that calls for a holistic redesign of the public school system by 2025. This initiative is grounded in the foundational work of the AASA Learning 2025 National Commission, comprised of thought leaders in education, business, community, and philanthropy. The work of [AASA Learning 2025](#) is guided by the commission's report, *An American Imperative: A New Vision of Public Schools*.

As part of this initiative, AASA Learning 2025 demonstration systems are creating student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven educational systems that serve ALL learners. This initiative is based on recurrent core redesign components, including: (1) **Culture**: Systems redesign must occur within an intentional and relationships-based culture that is Whole Learner Focused; dedicated to ensuring that No Learner Is Marginalized; and Future Driven, anticipating forthcoming changes in post-secondary and career landscapes to inform all decisions today. (2) **Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Growth**: Educational systems must address the strengths and needs of the Whole Learner, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development as a holistic component of educational transformation; and (3) **Resources**: Every learner must succeed and have equitable access to the educational resources and support services necessary to ensure their success.

To demonstrate the power and effectiveness of participating AASA Learning 2025 school districts, AASA is sharing with members the educational community case studies showcasing exemplary school systems that are a part of this network. In this case study, you will learn how the College Community School District (Cedar Rapids Prairie, Iowa) is implementing a ten-year strategic planning process to create a personalized learning system built on a guaranteed and viable curriculum. The plan emphasizes a multi-tiered system of supports to sustain an organizational culture that is student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven.

According to Superintendent Douglass Wheeler, "The central outcome of the Learning 2025 Wheel is to redesign, re-engineer, and co-author our learning environments...to create personalized learning systems. This is central to the work we have been doing. While our goal, focus areas, and commitments remain unchanged anchors for this work, we have approached [our strategic plan] as an iterative process. Each year, as new data is available and we gather input from stakeholders, this plan is updated. As we monitor implementation and discover best practices and next practices that might strengthen our goal, each year we work to examine the action and success indicator elements of the plan. As we have engaged in the AASA Learning 2025 initiative, these new learning, networking, and professional growth opportunities strongly influence our yearly updates."

“ The College Community School District is deeply committed to using data-driven assessment and evaluation processes to monitor student progress and determine the impact of its instructional and support programs.”

## A Profile of the College Community School District



The College Community School District (Known as Cedar Rapids Prairie) is a growing school district that serves approximately 5,700 students from Linn, Benton, and Johnson Counties in Iowa, an area that includes the cities of Ely, Fairfax, Shueyville, Swisher, Walford, and Southwest Cedar Rapids. The district's area of service is 136 square miles, including rural, suburban and urban areas. Students are served on a central campus that includes 10 school sites and two special program sites. Its stated vision is: "Success for ALL."

This district serves an increasingly diverse population of students, including 20% non-White, 13% Special Education, 8.5% Gifted and Talented, and 4% English Language Learners.

Thirty-three percent of students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. CCSD's graduation rate is consistently 93% or higher with over 60% of students earning college credit before graduation and over 85% of students participating in an extra or co-curricular activity. CCSD's annual operating budget is \$105M.

Read a current full [District Demographic Profile](#).

## Progress Monitoring Using Data-Driven Evidence

The College Community School District has adopted a wide range of priority goals related to the AASA Learning 2025 initiative. As part of its ten-year strategic planning process, the district has elected to emphasize the following key components and learning accelerators:

1. A focus on addressing the strengths and needs of the Whole Learner;
2. Promoting anti-marginalization, ensuring equity and excellence for all learners;
3. Becoming future-driven and ensuring that all students are "future ready";
4. Reinforcing social-emotional learning in all schools and classrooms; and
5. Integrating a range of Learning 2025 priority areas and accelerators into long-range strategic planning, including adopting and sustaining a cognitive growth model, treating all learners as co-authors of their own learning process, maintaining a diverse educator pipeline, reinforcing technology-enhanced learning, and engaging all stakeholders (e.g., families, community members, businesses and community organizations) in decision-making and problem-solving processes.





The College Community School District is deeply committed to using data-driven assessment and evaluation processes to monitor student progress and determine the impact of its instructional and support programs. Specifically, the district identifies the following key evidence to be used to determine growth in identified Learning 2025 redesign components:

1. District-wide Common Assessments (DCAs) are given throughout the year in English and Mathematics. During the 2022-23 academic year, the district is beginning a process to add Social Studies and Science in Grade 9-12. The goal is to measure effectiveness of Tier 1 (i.e., the comprehensive curriculum and instructional program for all learners) programs and practices, targeting 80% proficient at first attempt as a key “look-for” indicator.
2. Stakeholder Surveys: A range of surveys will be used to determine growth in a range of identified areas, including a strong emphasis upon social and emotional learning indicators:
  - a. Student Key Indicators: Belonging and Equity; Learning Engagement; and Future-Ready/Career Preparation
  - b. Staff Indicators: Belonging and Equity; Personalized Learning Actions; Professional Learning Communities; and SEBH Themes
  - c. Parents/Families Indicators: Belong and Equity; Communication/Engagement; and Programming/Opportunities for Students
3. Standardized Growth Assessments: CCSD is committed to using standardized test and related data to monitor the impact and value-added effects of its 10-year strategic planning process, including
  - a. Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASSP): English Language Arts (Grades 3–11); Mathematics (Grades 3–11); and Science (Grades 5, 8, 10)
  - b. Elementary Progress Monitoring: FAST Literacy (Grades K-6) and iReady Math (Grades K-6)
  - c. Middle Level Progress Monitoring: NWEA MAP Growth (Grades 7-9)
  - d. High School: ACT Data, Grade 11
4. SEBH Data (Growth):
  - a. Early Indicator Reports: Attendance (Overall and Chronic Absenteeism); Behavior; Universal Screening, K–6 (Social Academic Behavior Risk Screener); Academic Progress
  - b. Equity Reports: Academic and Behavior (i.e., Major/Serious Behavior and/or Suspension); Instructional Practice: Implementation of Phonics and Comprehension Best Practices (K–6); Implementation of Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices (K–6); and Teacher Growth on the Core Teaching Capabilities (PK–12)

## Addressing the Whole Learner

In CCSD, students have a growing number of pathways and rich experiences in which to learn. These are offered in a system of “guaranteed and equitable environments,” emphasizing a commitment to ensuring that all classrooms be predictable and safe spaces where students' social and emotional needs are supported—regardless of the barriers that an individual student may have (e.g., language proficiency, toxic stress, mental illness, physical, or cognitive disabilities).



In alignment with the district's *Ten-Year Strategic Plan*, educators in this district continue to strengthen their capacity to address the potential, development, and needs of the Whole Learner. The CCSD learning community demonstrates its commitment to this principle by providing professional learning for all certified staff in effective classroom practices for social, emotional, and behavioral health so that all students, including those who have experienced significant adversity in their home and/or community, have a classroom and school environment that fosters their resilience.

Additionally, CCSD educators provide school-based therapy in every school building and have a robust network of local providers to refer families to when school-based caseloads are at capacity. Annually, all schools formally evaluate their progress in providing layers of academic and social-emotional support to students through their Self-Assessment of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Implementation and set goals for continuous growth.

## Promoting Anti-Marginalization

Another key AASA Learning 2025 commitment involves transforming education to eliminate disparities and disenfranchisement of under-performing students and groups. *Equity, Engagement, and Empowerment* are listed as the three “WHYS” of the district’s personalized learning efforts. Emphatically, anti-marginalization practices are the foundation of personalized learning. Students are invited to serve as co-creators in their learning experiences and environments.





The district is striving to demonstrate its commitment to anti-marginalization through the following processes:

1. Providing equity-focused professional learning to all staff
2. Implementing Professional Learning Community practices and structures
3. Using Universal Design for Learning as a unifying model for promoting the success of all learners, especially those identified for Special Education
4. Building and implementing a coherent and standards-driven instructional program using curriculum mapping
5. Reinforcing standards-based learning and grading practices.

All schools in CCSD utilize a Behavior Response Matrix to guide their decision-making involving student discipline. Similarly, the district's Gifted and Talented eligibility process offers multiple pathways to ensure that underrepresented populations are provided access to these services. Also, the district is in collaboration with Hanover Research to develop a systemic action plan related to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## Emphasizing the Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

In alignment with its Ten-Year Strategic Plan, CCSD continues to strengthen its commitment to social-emotional learning by providing a guaranteed and viable social-emotional skills curriculum at the preschool through eighth-grade levels. Social emotional learning is not isolated to this curriculum, however. All K-6 classrooms incorporate daily Morning Meetings (as developed by the Responsive Classrooms approach) or other community-building structures to foster an environment of respect and inclusion.



District educators continuously collect and analyze data related to students' attitudes toward school and their social-emotional wellness including the Conditions for Learning Survey, the Student Perceptions Survey, the Iowa Youth Survey, and the Social, Academic, Emotional, Behavior Rating Scale universal screening tool. The district has published established belief statements that ensure common philosophies and approaches when working with all students. Future work in this area includes the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum for social emotional skills at the 9th - 12th grade levels. Staff also implement Teacher Child Interaction Training (TCIT) in which preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers and teachers in the district's special school setting receive intensive, yet positive and supporting, coaching in effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to develop students' emotional co-regulation skills.

## Becoming Future-Driven

Designing for student programs embedded with learning experiences in workplace learning, career and post secondary readiness, and personalized learning is a continued focus in CCSD schools. This Future-Driven focus ensures student access to achieving Prairie Ready (Redefining Ready) indicators to develop and monitor systems to promote college and career readiness. These systems include ongoing development of career academies that allow students to examine different career areas and are embedded with workplace learning.

To achieve these goals, the district provides all students career pathway programs and opportunities that involve engaging learning experiences and opportunities to explore their future and the future of the workplace. District educators have invested in tools such as Xello to provide students an interactive template and activities to plan for their future. Career academies include Agriculture, Industrial Technology, and Business. During the 2022-23 academic year, the district will launch a medical academy in the spring. Additionally, staff members are in the process of designing a culinary academy and educator preparation academy for launch next year. Additionally, they are partnering with Junior Achievement to re-envision career exploration and financial literacy programs and courses in grades 7-9.



To further enhance its post-secondary / career readiness initiatives, CCSD is in its second year partnering with our neighboring community college (Kirkwood Community College) to fund a College Career Transitions Counselor. This position aims to enhance post-secondary access for 11th and 12th grade students with a special focus on traditionally marginalized groups (started during the 2021-2022 school year).

Learners with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and also have more significant disabilities may continue beyond graduation to receive transitional services / workplace readiness skills through the Prairie Woods Transition Center through their 21st birthday. These services for graduates (ages 18-21) include a transition center located on the campus of Kirkwood Community College and embedded job training and work readiness opportunities that are integrated into their high school experience.

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The College Community School District is committed to building future-ready learners, a principle embedded in its stated goal to create a personalized learning system for all learners. Superintendent Douglas Wheeler asserts that: “We are on a multi-year journey to create personalized learning systems as the intended outcome of our 10-year strategic plan.” To achieve this vision, the district emphasizes a:

- guaranteed and viable curriculum
- guaranteed and viable learning environments that are equity and committed to excellence for all
- a strong multi-tiered system of supports.

The district’s clearly articulated definition of personalized learning is presented in [Prairie Personalized 3.0](#).

To anchor efforts of personalized learning across the system, CCSD has embedded Education Element’s Core Four (flexible content and tools, targeted instruction, data-driven decisions, and student reflection and ownership) to implement strategies essential to a personalized learning system. Its personalized learning work includes the yearly incorporation of at least one element of the Education Elements Core Four Elements for personalized learning in each staff member’s professional learning plan as a focus for growth in addition to ongoing professional learning of the Core Four.

To personalize the journey for students, staff have launched a robust development plan for career academies to engage students in a program of study for interest areas identified in the four-year planning process at the secondary level. All academy experiences include a minimum a sequence of three courses in the pathway, guidance on courses that would enhance post-high school learning in the career cluster, and opportunities for college credit, certification, and/or workplace experiences prior to graduation. For several years, over 65% of the district’s students have received at least one college credit course prior to graduation at the neighboring community college.

Additionally, a partnership with this community college and the local ICR future organization provides internship opportunities to 20% of district students, with staff working to create more opportunities for learners in this area. Future work includes continuing to identify community-relevant career clusters for academy and pathway development, measurement and data-based action from our Prairie Ready dashboard, and further alignment of course offerings that personalize not only the classroom experience, but the overall student experience K-12.

In addition to programming and pedagogy, our efforts to build future-ready learners is linked to the district’s commitment to social emotional learning, building understanding that social emotional competencies are central to the learning process. This work is reinforced by the district’s adopted [Sebh Belief Statements](#). According to Superintendent Wheeler: “These statements are more than words on a paper: they are used to design professional learning for staff and referenced in decision-making for system initiatives including, but not limited to curriculum, staffing structures, and behavior/attendance intervention.”



**“ CCSD is deeply involved with a range of community outreach and collaborative processes involving key stakeholder groups.”**

## Promoting a Diverse Educator Pipeline

Like districts throughout the United States, CCSD is challenged by the availability of educational graduates who adequately reflect the diversity of its students. Therefore, this school system has started active recruiting efforts beyond the state of Iowa through hiring fairs. They have also hired a new position (i.e., Human Resources Generalist) with full-time responsibilities for addressing this problem of practice.

In addition to addressing general shortages, this new position is charged with developing strategies to increase the diversity of our staff through new/innovative recruitment methods. Additionally, CCSD supports temporary certification and pay towards coursework for teachers needing licensure in a given area. It also supports paraprofessionals through partnerships with university programs to pursue their teaching license.

Initial efforts in this area have yielded an increase of 2% in teacher and administrator diversity, 2% increase of diversity of classified staffing, and a 4% overall increase in diversity in our workforce over the past three years.

## Providing Access for All Children to High Quality Early Learning Experiences

The College Community School District is deeply committed to ensuring that students' pre-K experience establishes a solid and sustainable foundation for students. It has identified a variety of processes and programs that reinforce this commitment:

1. Maintaining NAEYC Early Learning Program accreditation, Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) accreditation, exemplary home-school communication, student enrollment, and rigorous hiring practices (despite staffing challenges in the area served by the district and other lingering challenges related to the pandemic).
2. Partnering with the Affordable Housing Network, Four Oaks, Area Substance Abuse Council, and Hawkeye Area Community Action Program to offer preschool, childcare wrap-around services, and meals to four-year old students in a high-need apartment complex in the district.
3. Providing 6.5 hours of high-quality professional learning to all preschool staff, opportunities to analyze student data, and ample time to plan for instruction in response to student needs (weekly).
4. The district's yearly average of incoming kindergarten students who have completed pre-school in its Early Childhood program is consistently at or above 70%.





## Using Technology as a “Force Multiplier”

CCSD utilizes technology to increase student engagement in all of its schools. This process includes a district-wide initiative to ensure a device for use by every student. Staff members utilize online learning tools to meet student needs including a fully online school program, online tools for credit recovery, and engaging learning tools for teacher and student use. The district has also mobilized long- and short-term online learning opportunities (post-pandemic) for students unable to attend school due to medical treatment or temporary placement. Educators are currently working to integrate computer science instruction across grade levels K-12.

## Unlocking Community Resources

Involvement of families and community partners is an essential commitment and guiding principle of AASA’s Learning 2025 initiative. CCSD is deeply involved with a range of community outreach and collaborative processes involving key stakeholder groups, including:

**The district has an advisory group for social, emotional, and behavioral health that meets three times per year.**

Members include mental health providers, law enforcement, non-profit agencies, parents, local hospitals, juvenile court services, public health, and school staff. College Community is also part of the My Care Community group established by Linn County Public Health and is onboarding the Unite Us platform to streamline referrals for mental and physical health needs and basic needs such as housing, utility assistance, clothing and food.

**District students have access to school-based therapy through two established organizations and other referrals can be made to agencies in the Cedar Rapids area whenever needed.**

CCSD allocates a portion of its at-risk funding so that school-based therapists can provide prevention services to staff members. Groups of students and therapists can participate in team meetings with school staff to address student needs more comprehensively.

**CCSD has established the Prairie Cares program that includes a Prairie Cares Market offering weekly food distribution to families.**

The Prairie Cares Closet provides clothing and school supplies. The Prairie Cares Families in Need Fund addresses individual student needs that cannot be met throughout other community resources. These programs are made possible through the district’s partnership with the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program, the Prairie School Foundation, student and community volunteers, and students who have work experience goals as part of their Individualized Educational Plan.

## Suggested Guide Questions

1. How do the priority goals identified for the College Community School District reflect key principles and priorities associated with the AASA Learning 2025 initiative?
2. To what extent is your school district currently addressing similar long-range goals and performance indicators as part of its strategic planning process?
3. How is CCSD responding to the “Whole Learner,” ensuring that every student’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development is addressed?
4. Anti-marginalization is a major priority in CCSD. What specific strategies and processes is the district employing to address inequities and issues of disproportionality?
5. In your opinion, what does it mean for a school district to be “future-driven”? What are the CCSD priority initiatives to support this AASA Learning 2025 focus area? How does it conceptualize the portrait of a learner who is “future ready”?
6. A major emphasis in the district is the monitoring of program implementation related to social-emotional learning. What are specific ways in which CCSD is emphasizing a systemic approach to this issue?
7. A major emphasis in CCSD is data collection and analysis related to the implementation of key AASA Learning 2025 priorities. To what extent do the data points and related assessments used by the district to align with its priority goals? Are there additional data points you would recommend they use to capture the impact of their transformation initiatives?
8. Teacher, administrative, and support staff hiring is an emerging national issue in public education. What is your reaction to CCSD’s efforts to promote a diverse educator pipeline?
9. A major learning accelerator in AASA’s Learning 2025 initiative is the use of technology as a “force multiplier” to meet the needs of the whole learner. What is your assessment of CCSD’s approach to this priority area?
10. Finally, how is CCSD unlocking community resources, including families, community stakeholder groups, and business leaders? Based on your school district’s programs, do you have additional recommendations that the leadership of this district might consider?





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