



# STATE OF IOWA

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
JASON E. GLASS, DIRECTOR

December 21, 2011

Director of Education Jeff Frost  
Cedar Valley Catholic School System  
3231 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Waterloo, Iowa 50702

Dear Director Frost

Attached is the report of findings for the Comprehensive School Improvement Site Visit conducted at Cedar Valley Catholic Schools on October 25-26, 2011. The report is based upon a variety of interviews conducted with district staff and stakeholder groups during the indicated dates, and review of documents submitted to the Department and on-site.

The site visit was designed to assess the district's progress with its Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), provide a general assessment of educational practices within the district, make recommendations for improvement, and determine compliance with state accreditation standards and applicable federal program requirements.

Based on the findings from the comprehensive site visit, Cedar Valley Catholic Schools maintains State of Iowa accreditation. No non-compliance issues were noted and no corrective action plan is required.

The report reflects consensus of the following team members:

**Department of Education Representatives:**

Eric Heitz, School Improvement Consultant

**Area Education Agency Representatives:**

Jim Reed, Special Education Sector Coordinator  
Marcia Knupp, Curriculum and Mentoring Consultant

**Local Education Agency Representatives:**

Tom Keating, Xavier High School, Principal  
Mary Yamoah, Cascade Aquin, Principal

**Other Representatives:**

Alice Conlon, Archdiocese of Dubuque, Associate Director of Education Services\Curriculum Issues

It is our hope this report will provide guidance to enhance student achievement in the school and support continuing conversations among staff and community members about the local education system, how and what students are learning, and how *more* students can learn at higher levels.

As part of the Cedar Valley Catholic Schools continuous improvement process, the school must review its current CSIP and provide revisions as needed. Revisions should be based on the school's needs assessments (including the attached report), student achievement data, stakeholder input, and established priorities. Recertification of the CSIP must be completed by September 15, 2012. Directions for revision and submission of the CSIP can be found at: <https://www.edinfo.state.ia.us/securelogin.asp>.

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The Department would appreciate the school's feedback regarding its site visit experience. This feedback will inform the Department's efforts to continuously improve the comprehensive site visit process. A short online survey has been developed and is available at the following site: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W58H5LZ>. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Responses are confidential and shared in aggregate form with members of the Department's School Improvement Team.

The visiting team again extends its gratitude to you and the Cedar Valley Catholic staff and patrons in preparing for and showing courtesy during the visit. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,



Eric Heitz  
School Improvement Consultant  
Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services  
Iowa Department of Education



Del Hoover, Deputy Administrator  
Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services  
Iowa Department of Education

cc: Site Visit Team Members  
School Board President  
Iowa Department of Education Official File  
AEA Office

# **Comprehensive Site Visit Iowa Department of Education**



## **Cedar Valley Catholic Schools**

**Team Findings  
October 25-26, 2011**

Iowa Department of Education  
Grimes State Office Building  
400 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

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## **Vision, Mission, and Goals**

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In an improving district/school, the vision, mission, and goals are clearly communicated in the school and community. Stakeholders understand and share a commitment to the district/school expectations, goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The vision guides allocations of time and resources. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Clearly articulated mission is established collaboratively with stakeholder groups representing the diversity of the community.
- Vision, mission, and goals are communicated throughout the system and community.
- The vision and mission of the district/school guide teaching and learning.
- Every five years, the comprehensive needs assessment process, with input from stakeholders, is used to review and revise the beliefs, mission, and/or vision; major educational needs; and student learning goals.
- Academic and academic-related data are analyzed and used to determine prioritized goals.
- Goals guide assessment of student achievement, district/school effectiveness, and the allocation of time and resources.
- The vision, mission, and goals support values of respecting and valuing diversity.

### **Noted Strengths:**

1. The Cedar Valley Catholic Schools (CVCS) leadership and board members mentioned the vision, mission, beliefs, and goals are reviewed at regular intervals to ensure they reflect current priorities and needs. In addition, operational goals have been developed to guide other initiatives and needs.
2. There is a high degree of awareness of the need to discuss assessments related to instruction. Administrators, board members, and School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) members spoke about the value of utilizing student achievement and school climate data to make recommendation and/or decisions.
3. The interview with the SIAC and tours of the buildings indicated CVCS respects and values diversity. SIAC members commented the strength of the committee was the diversity of its members. During building tours the team saw how the system respects and values diversity of English Language Learner (ELL) students.
4. Interviews with SIAC members indicated the group understands their role and responsibilities. Members commented recommendations are made to the board such as the 1 to 1 initiative and the committee is responsible to gain input and provide feedback to the schools and parishes.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

5. Parents and instructional support groups stated there are many positive features and activities going on at CVCS, but there is a need to get the "word out" to the community on a more frequent basis. It is recommended a more formal communication plan be developed to market the positive experiences CVCS has to offer. Consider having the SIAC make recommendations to board on how to market CVCS to the Cedar Valley.
6. Interviews with SIAC members and staff did not indicate a concerted effort to consistently and prominently display and communicate the vision, mission and goal statements to all stakeholders. CVCS is encouraged to review and discuss the vision, mission and goals with staff and SIAC members. This discussion may include the following question:
  - How are the vision, mission, and goals integrated into instruction on a daily basis?
  - How does the system know if it is meeting the vision, mission, and goals.

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## Leadership

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In an improving district/school, leaders communicate a shared sense of purpose and understanding of the district/school's values. Leaders have a visible presence, provide resources and ensure two-way communication between the educational system and stakeholders. Leaders provide encouragement, recognition, and support for improving student learning and staff performance. Leadership is committed, persistent, proactive, and distributed throughout the system. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Policies and procedures are established to effectively support district/school operations.
- The school board and district/school administrators implement an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel.
- Policies and practices are implemented to reduce and eliminate discrimination and harassment and to reflect, respect, and celebrate diversity.
- The role and responsibility of administrative leaders is supported, respected, and understood.
- A clearly defined system and expectations are established for the collection, analysis, and use of data regarding student achievement and progress with the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP).
- The capacity of staff, students, and parents to contribute and lead is built and supported.
- Opportunities for participation are provided for input, feedback, and ownership for student and system success among staff, students, parents, and community.
- Equity in access to learning opportunities and compliance with local, state, and federal legislation is ensured.
- Leaders at all levels understand and manage the change process.

### **Noted Strengths:**

7. The system appears to value input from all stakeholders. Groups interviewed noted they have opportunities to provide input and that the input has often led to action or initiatives. Examples included:
  - Multiple surveys
  - Parish service projects
  - Program Improvement Committee (PIC) boot camp
  - High, multifaceted level of support from clergy.
8. Students are provided with multiple opportunities for leadership. Students interviewed commented on the leadership opportunities such as Young Leaders in Action, retreats, student government, Senior Leadership Team and Service Learning Projects.
9. The Cedar Valley Catholic School System was created in 2003. Interviews with all groups and tours of the buildings indicated the Cedar Valley Catholic System School is truly functioning as a system versus separate buildings. Examples include:
  - New Middle School Building
  - Implementation of the Middle School Concept
  - Alignment of curriculum among buildings and grade levels
  - Consistent professional development
  - Technology initiatives and training
  - Projects and activities that involve students from all buildings coming together
  - Committees makeup and participation includes staff members from multiple buildings
  - System Data Review Team (SDRT)
  - Administrator meetings
10. Multiple interview groups recognized the positive administrative leadership in all buildings and the system's Director of Education. Building on what was in place; the leadership has come together

with common passion and goals and is a cohesive and credible group of leaders. All decisions are based on what is best for students. Examples include: technology training, SDRT, and transition between buildings.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

None

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## **Collaborative Relationships**

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In an improving district/school, stakeholders understand and support the mission and goals of the district/school and have meaningful roles in the decision-making process. Collaboration results from a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership among stakeholders from diverse community groups. Educators in the system develop and nurture a professional culture and collaborative relationships marked by mutual respect and trust inside and outside of the organization. The system works together with balance between district direction and school autonomy. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Instructional staff is provided opportunities for interaction to focus on professional issues.
- Instructional staff constructively analyzes and critiques practices and procedures including content, instruction, and assessment.
- Instructional staff follows established procedures to resolve professional conflicts, solve problems, share information about students, and communicate student information to parents.
- Processes and procedures that invite and respect stakeholder input, support, and interaction are implemented by the district/school.
- Parents are involved as partners in the educational process.
- Positive alliances among school staff, students, parents, and diverse community groups are created and nurtured.

**Noted Strengths:**

11. The teacher group interviewed expressed great satisfaction with the scope and availability of current professional development (PD) activities. They felt the survey regarding their needs in the area of PD was an effective way to increase their ownership of PD.
12. Teachers spend time collaborating with staff members from other buildings in developing instructional strategies and strengthening their teaching skills. They are embracing the idea of moving to Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to do even more of this type of collaboration.
13. Teacher, parents and the SIAC discussed how their input was gained prior to implementing major decisions and initiatives. Examples included:
  - 1 to 1 Initiative
  - Climate Survey
  - Pacings
  - Plan for PD
14. The system has worked closely with local schools to provide opportunities to students that are not available at the CVCS. Examples of these opportunities included:
  - Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) with West HS
  - Future Farmers of America (FFA) with Hudson Community Schools
  - Student Transportation with Waterloo Public Schools

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

15. The CVCS is in the midst of constructing a middle school next to the high school. To help with this transition, CVCS hired a principal prior to the completion of the building. The principal is developing curriculum, reviewing staff roles and setting a tone to ensure success of the middle school. The team understands this commitment and encourages this type of commitment to continue after the middle school is built. This may include hiring or contracting services of an individual to help with curriculum and overall school improvement. This resource will be helpful to ensure a smooth delivery of services at each and between all of the CVCS buildings.

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## **Learning Environment**

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In an improving district/school, the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning. The environment is safe, orderly, purposeful, and free from threat of physical, social, and emotional harm. Teachers are familiar with students' cultures and know how to work effectively in a multi-cultural setting. Students are guided to think critically about learning and have opportunities to apply learning to real world situations. Classrooms are integrated with diverse learners (i.e., gender, race, special needs, at-risk, gifted). Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Rules and procedures for behavior and consequences are clearly communicated and consistently administered.
- School facilities are physically accessible and school routines enhance student learning.
- Materials, resources, technology, programs, and activities reflecting diversity are available to all students.
- The district/school provides a clean, inviting, welcoming environment.
- A clearly understood crisis management plan is established, communicated, and implemented when necessary.
- Teaching and learning are protected from external disturbances and internal distractions.
- The district/school reflects the contributions and perspectives of diverse groups and preserves the cultural dignity of staff, students, and parents.

### **Noted Strengths:**

16. Interviews with students and the SIAC indicated a strong Service Learning Program and Leadership Program. To ensure a strong program the system hired a coordinator. In addition, students and their projects have been recognized for their work in the community by receiving the Governor's Leadership Award and Waterloo Human Rights Award.
17. There is a system-wide safe, caring environment. Programs such as Catholic Character Counts, family wellness, and the recognition of student positive behaviors are examples. In addition, during the building tours, there was visual evidence of Pillars of Catholic Character.
18. The CVCS has made a large investment in technology for students. This was evident during building tours and interviews. Examples of technology included:
  - iPads
  - Lap tops
  - Smart Boards

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

19. Members of the SIAC and students interviewed commented on the opportunities available to students in the CVCS. They believe the current opportunities students have had have been successful and commented they would like to see additional course opportunities and extracurricular activities offered at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Examples included:
  - Lego/robotic extracurricular opportunities
  - Have students meet prior to major transitions.
  - Additional postsecondary opportunities (2 and 4 year).
  - Additional Foreign language options.
20. During the district overview and through interviews, it was evident the CVCS is very proud of their rich diversity. Continue to reflect upon the contributions and perspectives of these diverse groups and how they can impact learning for all groups. This may include exploring additional opportunities outside of the church to explore diversity in the Cedar Valley Area.

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## **Curriculum and Instruction**

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In an improving school, curriculum challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity. There is an emphasis on principles of high quality instruction, clear expectations for what is taught, and high expectations for student achievement. Educators have a common understanding of quality teaching and learning. Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of learners within the classroom. Teachers have knowledge and skills need to effectively implement characteristics of effective instruction. The staff accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the essential curriculum (e.g., Iowa Core Curriculum). Instructional time is allocated to support student learning. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Educators implement effective instructional practices for each and every student.
- School and classroom tasks and activities are inherently engaging, relevant, and lead to applying knowledge to authentic tasks.
- Content, instruction, assessments, and policy are aligned.
- A shared vision of effective instruction is held by all instructional staff.
- Curriculum and instruction reflect contributions from diverse racial, ethnic, and personal backgrounds.
- Students are provided opportunity and time to learn.
- Teachers are provided with an instructional framework that employs research-based strategies for use with diverse learner characteristics.
- Instructional decisions utilize a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data.

### **Noted Strengths:**

21. To ensure all student needs are met, the CVCS has implemented a number of instructional strategies. Examples included:
  - Parents and SIAC members interviewed commented students' specific needs are continually addressed through General Education Intervention data collection, action plans, and through the support of the Skills' Teachers.
  - During classroom observations it was noted Skills' Teacher were working collaboratively with the general education teachers.
  - Teachers and administration expressed a focus on meeting the needs of all students with special emphasis on struggling students and those that need enrichment.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

22. Interviews with teachers and building tours indicated an increased population of English Language Learners (ELL) in the past few months. The system has addressed the needs of these learners. During the interviews administration commented that they plan to see more ELL students enter the system because of the positive experience of the current students. With this in mind the school system is encouraged to develop a formal plan to ensure all needs of ELL students and their families are met.

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## **Professional Development**

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In an improving district/school, staff is qualified for assignments and engages in ongoing learning opportunities to improve effectiveness. Student achievement and other sources of data are used to set goals for professional development. The district provides professional learning opportunities that include theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Professional development focus is determined through the analysis of student achievement and performance data.
- Professional development is focused and based on research-based strategies.
- Professional development sessions build on one another, are distributed throughout the school year, and are sustained over time.
- Time is provided for teachers to collaborate and apply new content and pedagogical knowledge.
- An established system provides support to monitor and evaluate implementation of professional development and its impact on student learning.
- Formative student data and teacher implementation data are used to adjust professional development and guide instructional decisions.
- All school staff members, instructional and non-instructional, are provided professional development to support job roles and functions.
- Professional development activities contribute to the capacity of all school staff to develop cultural competence and to reflect and respect diversity in classroom and work environments.

### **Noted Strengths:**

23. The entire administrative team was commended for their leadership in professional development by staff. Teachers commented professional development is focused, sustained and aligned to student needs. Teachers also commented they are provided with time for professional development. Examples included Wednesday early outs and summer institutes.
24. The System has taken a proactive role in providing training on the use of technology. Teachers and administration commented the rollout of the 1:1 initiative was well thought out and teachers felt prepared for implementation. Administrators commented 83% of staff attended iPad training during the Summit Institute. (Please see related comment in number 26)
25. Professional development opportunities are available for a variety of certified and non-certified roles to help enhance their professional skills. Examples included: I-Summit, technology development, Health Department and Serve Safe Training, and ongoing Character Counts program.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

26. Technology is available to students and staff in numerous ways, such as iPads and Smart Boards. The system has done an excellent job of providing staff with technology training. However during building tours it was noted a number of the technology resources were not used

in the classrooms. The System is encouraged to work with staff to discuss the next level of technology implementation. The discussion may include the following questions:

- How could technology be used in the classroom to meet the needs of diverse learners?
  - What professional development will be needed for staff?
  - How will administration and stakeholders provide feedback on the use of technology to meet the needs of diverse learners?
  - How will we as a system know if technology has made a difference for our students?
27. The board members who were interviewed reported not all members have received board professional development. Diocesan wide training is not offered every year, therefore, not all members have had training. Consider scheduling board training a minimum of once each year. The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) offers professional development for boards that deals specifically with Catholic schools and issues that are unique to those schools.

## Monitoring and Accountability

In an improving district/school, the district/school establishes a comprehensive system that monitors and documents performance of student progress, curriculum, instruction, programs, and initiatives. Results from assessments drive the goal setting and decision-making processes. Leadership supports a system that regularly analyzes student performance and program effectiveness. Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A system for district-wide student assessments, including multiple measures that are valid and reliable, is implemented.
- Decision-making for the continuous improvement of instruction and student learning using student achievement and teacher implementation data is employed.
- The district's/school's cycle of program evaluation as noted in its CSIP is implemented.
- Summative evaluation processes are used to determine whether professional development has resulted in improved student learning.

### **Noted Strengths:**

28. CVCS is intentional about monitoring student progress through their use of data. Examples of data reviewed include: Daily 5, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Student Data Review Team and General Education Intervention Program. The system has also implemented an At-Risk report generated by PowerSchool. The report is used by principals and students to collaboratively plan for improvement. These discussions have increased students' awareness of growth areas and keep them current in understanding their progress in a timely manner. The use of data has also increased communication between teachers and parents.
29. Cedar Valley Catholic School (CVCS) reported proficiencies in its 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR) that exceeded state and/or AEA averages. The following charts indicate this achievement:

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Reading**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
3	84	74.82	77.32
5	80.82	76.53	79.85
6	75	66.75	69.12
8	90	72.81	74.35
11	85.52	76.25	76.77

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Mathematics**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
3	84	75.25	77.7
8	88.57	74.55	76.46
11	88.15	77.43	76.41

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Science**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
3	85.34	80.07	81.59
5	82.19	80.26	81.84
6	84.06	72.95	75.64
8	90	82.58	83.53
11	90.79	82.35	81.32

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

30. Instructional support staff indicated they were not sure of their roles and responsibilities. The system is recommended to review formal job descriptions on a yearly basis. This will help to ensure support staff understands their roles and responsibilities.
31. The percentage of the school's students scoring in the proficient range of achievement on the Iowa Tests is lower than AEA 267 and/or State of Iowa averages in reading, mathematics, and science in some reported grade levels. The following charts indicate these areas are:

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Reading**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
4	76.47	79.55	81.58
7	72.97	70.86	74

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Mathematics**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
4	79.42	80.31	81.34
5	69.86	76.18	79.41
6	69.12	71.48	74.22
7	71.62	77.89	78.93

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

**Percentage of Students Proficient in Science**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cedar Valley</b>	<b>AEA 267</b>	<b>State</b>
4	72.05	81.72	82.45
7	79.73	81.23	82.72

Source: 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report (APR)

It would be beneficial to complete an in-depth disaggregated data analysis of non-proficient performers to identify whether common characteristics exist (e.g., similar skill deficit or similar demographics), identify potential barriers to learning, and provide an additional source of data for school improvement planning. Reviewing students' performance on all district-wide assessment instruments (i.e., triangulating data) to determine validity and reliability of results (as well as the validity and reliability of district-developed assessments) is also recommended (e.g., Are there

students who are not proficient on the Iowa Tests, but are on other assessments?) In addition, the school is encouraged to:

- Continue analysis of disaggregated data and communication of results to improve instruction.
- Increase the use of cohort data (including subgroup cohorts) to identify trends and patterns over time, inform instructional decisions, and determine effectiveness of interventions.

Include broad involvement of teachers, SIAC members, administrators, school board, and instructional support staff in discussion of assessment data to increase understanding and ownership of the process.

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**Areas of Non-Compliance: Chapter 12**

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The school shall submit a plan of correction for each non-compliance item listed below to the Site Visit Team Leader within 45 business days of the receipt of this report. Evidence of corrective action for non-compliance(s) may be submitted with the plan or at a later date in accordance with the noted timeline. The school may choose to use the following matrix as a format for the development of an action plan or develop its own.

Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
None			

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**Areas of Non-Compliance: Outside of Chapter 12**

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Outside of Chapter 12 Non-compliance Issues	Additional Details	Plan of Correction	Timeline for Completion
None			

August 16, 2011 Iowa Department of Education Director Jason Glass directed School Improvement Consultants to modify the site visit accreditation process to include the following:

- The site visit team leader shall meet with the superintendent to review the non-compliance matrix draft prior to exiting the district.
- Following the review of the non-compliance matrix draft, the superintendent and consultant shall sign and date.
- The Department shall send the district a copy of the signed non-compliance matrix draft by registered return receipt within five (5) business days.

This process should be implemented beginning with the accreditation schedule beginning October, 2011.

Superintendent (Principal or Director)

Date

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School Improvement Consultant (Iowa Department of Education Representative)

Date

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