

January 1, 2021



# **Legislative Report**

## **Iowa Reading Research Center**

## IOWA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

State of Iowa  
Department of Education  
Grimes State Office Building  
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Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***Legislative Authority***

The Iowa Administrative Code 281, Chapter 61, established the Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) in 2013. The legislative purposes of the IRRC include developing and disseminating:

- Instructional strategies for prekindergarten through Grade 12 to achieve literacy proficiency that includes reading, reading comprehension, and writing for all students.
- Strategies for identifying and providing evidence-based interventions for students, beginning in kindergarten, who are at risk of not achieving literacy proficiency.
- Models for effective school, parent, and community partnerships to improve student literacy.
- Reading assessments.
- Professional development strategies and materials to support teacher effectiveness in student literacy development.
- Data reports on attendance center, school district, and statewide progress toward literacy proficiency in the context of student, attendance center, and school district demographic characteristics.
- An intensive summer literacy program.

The legislation also identified that the IRRC's first focus should be on improving reading performance and instruction in kindergarten through Grade 3.

### ***The University of Iowa***

The University of Iowa is the host for the IRRC because it is one of the nation's top public research universities, thus providing an academic base for the center director as well as resources to support the continued growth of the center. The University of Iowa is the fiscal agent and provides office space for the center's staff.

### ***Communication Methods***

The IRRC disseminates research findings and research-based resources via the IRRC website (<https://iowareadingresearch.org/>) as well as through study-specific reports (e.g., evaluation studies). Additionally, communication occurs through social media such as [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and the [IRRC's blog](#).

## READING RESEARCH STAKEHOLDERS

The IRRC conducts research in support of literacy education efforts across Iowa. Activities address the needs and concerns of the major stakeholders in the state such as:

- Local education agencies (LEAs)
- Nonpublic schools
- Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs)
- Iowa's institutes of higher education (IHEs), both private and public
- Community organizations
- Iowa Department of Education (Department)
- Professional organizations
- Educators
- Families

In addition, the IRRC is required to have an advisory council that meets three times per year. The director of the Department or the director's designee appoints the members. The IRRC Advisory Council met on the following dates during the 2020 calendar year: May 5, September 15, and December 16.

Members serve 4-year terms. Current members represent a cross section of organizations and institutions involved in supporting reading practices in the state. Members for fiscal year 2020 are:

Category	First Name	Last Name	Organization
Institutes of Higher Education	Nandita	Gurjar	University of Northern Iowa
	Jennifer	Stover	Iowa State University
	Deanna	Stoube	St. Ambrose University
Department of Education	Ann	Lebo	Iowa Department of Education
	Amy	Williamson	Iowa Department of Education
AEAs	Shane	Williams	Mississippi Bend AEA
	Jon	Sheldahl	Heartland AEA
LEAs (public and nonpublic)	Kate	Connealy	Bishop Heelan Catholic Schools
LEAs (public and nonpublic) Teachers	Corey	Vorthmann	Council Bluffs Community School District
	Erin	Sale	Waterloo Community School District
Educational Organizations	Beth	Ades-Hanson	Iowa State Education Association
Community Partners	Michael	Scott	State Library of Iowa
Parents	Katie	Greving	Parent and Decoding Dyslexia Iowa

## IRRC IMPLEMENTATION OF READING PRACTICES

The IRRC conducts the following types of applied research in collaboration with stakeholders:

1. Research to guide the development of literacy policy and practice
2. Research to inform the effective implementation of literacy policy and practice
3. Research to evaluate the impact of literacy policy and practice

The IRRC works in partnership with the Department, and its priorities are guided by legislative action and the recommendations of the IRRC Advisory Council. The following table provides a description of the 2020 activities of the IRRC listed by Iowa Administrative Code citations.

Calendar Year 2020 Progress	
IA Code Citations	In the Last Calendar Year, the IRRC Has...
Evidence-based Interventions and Strategies IAC § 284.32 1(b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created the following eLearning modules featuring evidence-based reading instructional strategies, which are available on the IRRC website (<a href="https://iowareadingresearch.org/elearning">https://iowareadingresearch.org/elearning</a>) at no cost to Iowa teachers:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Effective Vocabulary Instruction After Reading: Frayer Model (elementary version):</b> This module presents a vocabulary strategy that routinely is recommended for deepening students' understanding of key vocabulary words. The demonstration videos were filmed in a real Iowa classroom and show how to use the strategy to support learning about science concepts.</li> <li>○ <b>Effective Vocabulary Instruction After Reading: Frayer Model (secondary version):</b> This was our first module specifically designed for secondary instruction. It features applications of the strategy in content-area classrooms to support students' learning of important concepts, and the demonstration videos include a middle school social studies class co-taught by an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher.</li> <li>○ <b>Understanding and Observing the Literacy Skills Associated with Dyslexia:</b> In response to growing requests for additional information on dyslexia, we created this more in-depth exploration of the reading and writing skills most associated with the reading disability. Although filming in Iowa classrooms was canceled due to COVID-19, we were able to collaborate with a tutoring center and film four short videos. We also developed animated scenarios and other animations to help replace what might otherwise have been demonstrated with videos.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In addition to the three new modules described above, we updated the Dyslexia Overview module to make it more interactive. This module previously has been used mostly by pre-service educators in Iowa teacher preparation</li> </ul>

	<p>programs. Now, Senate File 2356 that was passed and signed into law in 2020 requires all in-service teachers to complete the module by July 1, 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed and posted 8 blog posts on reading instruction.</li> <li>• Presented at 4 state and regional conferences to share evidence-based literacy strategies with teachers.</li> </ul>
<p>School and Community Partnerships IAC § 284.32</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the school closures in spring 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we immediately shifted our efforts to support families who were trying to educate their children at home. To that end, we created and made available via Facebook, Twitter, and email a number of resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Published a downloadable learning guide with tips on establishing home learning areas, improving the home-based learning experience, and utilizing web resources for students kindergarten–Grade 6 and Grades 7–12 in the subjects of English-language arts, science, social studies, and history. Web resources for assistive technology for home learning are also included for students with reading disabilities.</li> <li>○ Hosted a 24-day book study for teens with vocabulary words and reflection questions related to each day’s reading assignment. This culminated in a live virtual Q&amp;A via videoconference with the author of the featured novel that allowed participating students to pose questions.</li> <li>○ Provided weekly writing prompts for Grades 1–6 over a 6-week period.</li> <li>○ Wrote blog posts for families and caregivers and increased our posting frequency to at least one post per week.</li> <li>○ Shared literacy learning resources for caregivers from around the web on Facebook and Twitter.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continued our partnership with the Cedar Rapids Community School District on middle school reading instruction. Assisted the district with a data-driven cycle to improve core instruction, build the capacity of instructional coaches to support teachers, and evaluate students’ literacy growth.</li> <li>• Continued our partnership with the Grant Wood Area Education Agency for implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports for literacy at the middle school level. This involves three middle schools and one high school who will be working over the next year on systemic improvement to their literacy instruction and interventions.</li> <li>• Continued our research partnership with the Green Hills Area Education Agency for a literacy training evaluation study. This involves monitoring fidelity of teacher implementation and measuring student literacy outcomes</li> </ul>

	<p>following professional development in Grades K–3 in four rural schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued our partnership with the Sioux City Community School District assisting with the planning phase of implementing small-group, skills-based literacy instruction at the middle school level.</li> <li>Partnered with the Marshalltown Community School District on identifying the learning progressions in English language arts standards for Grades 7–12.</li> <li>Began partnering with the Ottumwa Community School District on implementing an online version of Varied Practice Reading instructional approach for middle school students.</li> <li>Continued offering free assistive technology consultation appointments for families of children with dyslexia and other reading disabilities. Families can request a one-on-one assistive technology consultation appointment with our assistive technology coordinator in Iowa City, and can rent equipment for a short period of time to try out in the home. In the fall of 2020, we added a virtual appointment option.</li> </ul>
<p>Reading Assessments IAC § 284.32 1(d) IAC § 279.68 1(a)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued the Marshalltown Community School District Literacy Curricula Evaluation study. This project involved developing writing prompts and rubrics aligned to the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress for measuring the impact of new literacy curricula and materials adopted by the district on writing outcomes of students in Grades 1–6.</li> <li>Began a partnership with the Council Bluffs Community School District to evaluate the writing instruction and preparation of students in Grades 7–12.</li> <li>Advised the Ottumwa Community School District on literacy assessments for middle school students.</li> </ul>
<p>Data Reports IAC § 284.32 1(f)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepared the following reports for partnering school districts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of the Cedar Rapids Community School District’s Focus Instructional Cycle</li> <li>Evaluation of the LETRS professional development delivered by Green Hills AEA</li> <li>Tracking Marshalltown Community School District Students’ Writing Performance in Grades 1–6</li> <li>Evaluation of the Sioux City Community School District’s Middle School Initiative</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Intensive Summer Reading Program IAC § 279.68 4(c)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported the Council Bluffs Community School District Summer Reading Program by conducting remote reading intervention for six middle school students.</li> </ul>
<p>Professional Development IAC § 284.32 1(e)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded our eLearning offerings. The IRRC’s online professional development, or eLearning, is available to all Iowa educators at no cost from any laptop or desktop device (no travel required for attendees). eLearning modules feature:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Engaging animated representations of real-life scenarios.</li> <li>○ Videos showing the featured instructional method being used in real Iowa classrooms. Other videos include discussion from experts in literacy education, developmental pediatrics, and other specialty areas, as well as families.</li> <li>○ Interactive text, visual, and audio content featuring quizzes.</li> <li>○ A posttest to assess for knowledge gained.</li> <li>● Delivered 2 presentations and provided 6 instances of direct technical assistance to educators in the Marshalltown, Council Bluffs, and Ottumwa community school districts.</li> </ul>
<p>Dyslexia Senate File 2319 Chapter 1077</p> <p>and</p> <p>Senate File 2356</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updated the eLearning Dyslexia Overview module to make it more interactive. The module continues to support undergraduate and graduate students in teacher certification, reading endorsement, or reading specialist certification programs. It is also available at no cost to Iowa in-service teachers, Iowa families, and the general public.</li> <li>● Worked collaboratively with the Board of Educational Examiners in writing rules for the new Dyslexia Specialist endorsement.</li> <li>● Developed the coursework for the Dyslexia Specialist endorsement, which will be submitted for approval to the Department of Education and the Board of Educational Examiners.</li> <li>● Developed 4 blog posts on dyslexia-related topics.</li> <li>● Assisted the Governor’s Office with identifying potential members of the Dyslexia Board, which was established by Senate File 2356.</li> </ul>



## FUTURE

Despite the difficulties of conducting our work during the pandemic, the IRRRC still was able to address all of its mandates as described by the Iowa Administrative Code. As long as schools and families are dealing with different learning modalities and disruptions during the pandemic, we will continue developing resources and providing assistance that is responsive to these unique needs. Part of this effort is now being directed toward moving our Varied Practice Reading intervention to an online format by building a platform for students that will parallel our eLearning for teachers. Our first attempts at this will focus on the middle grades where we have been writing new passage sets. We also will continue creating new eLearning modules on literacy instructional topics because use grew exponentially immediately after the closures last spring.

When schools are able to transition back to more traditional forms of instruction, we anticipate needing to help them quickly identify and address students' learning gaps. We look forward to working with different partners on those efforts.

Finally, pending legislative support and funding, we will continue our role in developing the Dyslexia Specialist endorsement for the state and hosting a pilot cohort.