



Student Reading Success Through Research and Collaboration

**Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC)
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
September 17, 2021
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Department of Education – Des Moines**

Members present: Beth Ades-Hanson, Katie Greving, Nandita Gurjar, Kathleen Konrardy, Erin Sale, Jon Sheldahl, Shane Williams, Brad Niebling (Ann Lebo designee)

Additional attendees: Deborah K. Reed, IRRC Director; Trish Sodahl, IRRC Administrative Services Coordinator

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by IRRC Advisory Council (Council) Chair Katie Greving at 10:01 a.m.

2. Review of meeting outcomes

Katie Greving highlighted meeting agenda items, including reviewing roles of Council members, discussing ongoing work of the IRRC, learning about district work to address dyslexia, discussing the impact of school closures on writing development, and receiving Department of Education updates.

3. Approval of agenda

On a motion by Shane Williams, seconded by Erin Sale, the agenda for the meeting was approved with zero “no” votes.

4. Approval of May 2021 meeting minutes

On a motion by Beth Ades-Hanson, seconded by Jon Sheldahl, the May 2021 meeting minutes were approved with zero “no” votes.

5. Public comment

Chair Katie Greving allowed time for public comment. No members of the public were in attendance.

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6. Introductions

Deborah Reed introduced new Council member Kathleen Konrardy from Holy Family Catholic Schools, who was appointed to represent accredited nonpublic schools. Other Council members and staff introduced themselves and explained their affiliations with and roles in the Council.

7. Review of member roles

Chair Katie Greving reviewed the role of the Council. She described the work of the Council as communicating the IRRC's work and providing perspective and feedback from the various stakeholder groups that members represent. Deborah Reed added that the group is governed by its by-laws, and meetings are structured to provide opportunities to share ideas, suggest agenda items, and help the Center identify needs. The Center strives to provide timely responses to literacy concerns by working collaboratively with the AEA and other groups.

8. Director's report (IRRC)

Deborah Reed introduced the new eLearning module titled "Using Text Structures to Understand and Summarize Text." The module provides teachers with tools to help students better comprehend text. Although upper elementary grades are represented in the module, the lessons are also applicable to older students. Reed added that this module as well as all modules are free for Iowa in-service teachers.

Reed provided time for questions. In response to questions, Reed explained that the modules are not free to pre-service teachers (apart from Dyslexia Overview) because, after a pilot test with Loras College, it was determined that preservice educators needed more background knowledge to take advantage of the material. To have high-quality modules, they need to be developed for a specific audience, and in-service educators were the priority of the Governor's Blueprint initiative a few years ago. The eLearning system charges for enrollment based on email addresses and IP addresses for location. Reed also stated that Facilitator Guides are available for professional development. Literacy coaches and AEA consultants utilize the guides when working with educators.

Next, Reed reviewed eLearning usage, which has continued to grow. SF 2356 requires that all in-service teachers complete the Dyslexia Overview by June 30, 2024, so the number of users for that module is anticipated to be high for the next couple of years. Modules are predominantly viewed by Iowa residents, along with approximately 15% out-of-state enrollments and some international viewing as well, particularly of the VPR module. Reed noted that the IRRC continues to review feedback from most participants, and this feedback indicates that the modules are good to excellent. The negative comments tend to be about technical issues. The IRRC is continually working to improve online systems, recently contracting with a Learning Management System. When asked about IT daily support, Reed noted that programming and IT support are performed

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by IRRC staff as well as an impressive group of IRRC undergraduate students majoring in computer sciences.

Reed continued with an update on the new Dyslexia Specialist endorsement. There are 21 students in the cohort representing all AEAs, both private and public schools, and all grade levels K through 12. Council members inquired if there would be cohorts each year. Reed replied that the application numbers will determine when the program is offered, but the plans are to start a new cohort each fall. Reed also was asked to define the difference between Reading Endorsement, Dyslexia Endorsement, and Reading Specialist. Although there is some planned overlap in the programs' rules or topics, these programs are taught at different levels with unique content. The Reading Endorsement is bachelor's level, and the Reading Specialist is master's level. Other universities have shown interest in offering a Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement program when they are able.

Reed also demonstrated the online version of the Varied Practice Reading (VPR) instruction for Grades 1-5. The IRRC previously found that this approach demonstrated statistically significantly positive results compared to repeated reading. The IRRC will be launching an online version of the materials as a more affordable option to the printed books of passages currently available for purchase.

Reed further explained that additional research on a middle school version of VPR will be conducted with identified research partners in school districts that vary by geography, schedule type, and student population. The Council discussed the benefit of the program with the challenges of time allowed in middle schools for reading intervention.

9. Guest Speaker: Lonna Anderson - Dyslexia Friendly District

Lonna Anderson, Director of Elementary Education at the Ottumwa Community School District, joined the meeting via videoconference and provided an update on efforts to improve dyslexia services within the district. Ottumwa convened focus groups and administered surveys to determine why students were leaving the district. Results indicated many families were leaving to seek reading intervention services for their children, so the district launched several steps to improve their services, including creating a professional learning framework, providing intervention training, delivering specialized lessons, and hiring a dyslexia specialist. Future goals include providing before and after school intervention and continuing to increase staff members' knowledge.

Katie Greving thanked Anderson for being a leader in this area, noting that very few districts have taken these steps. Greving offered help communicating with parents, adding that people often are not comfortable talking about dyslexia. Anderson noted that the reaction to the program has been

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positive. Intervention is now provided in all of Ottumwa's elementary and middle schools, but high school is the biggest challenge. Anderson thanked Deborah Reed and the Center for ongoing training and expertise. Reed added that Ottumwa has been a great partner on other projects as well.

10. Professional Learning: Impact of school closures on writing development

Deborah Reed discussed the importance of early writing and reviewed the extensive writing study conducted to explore the expressive writing skills of students in Grades 1 and 2. The IRRC compared writing samples before and after the pandemic-related school closures and found statistically significantly lower scores in fall 2020 than the previous year, particularly in Grade 1. A positive note was that students moving from Grade 1 to 2 in fall 2020 did not lose everything they had learned before schools closed the previous spring.

Reed provided time for questions and asked for the Council's input on needs for next year. Council members discussed, at length, other factors impacting learning loss, such as digital learning versus in-person instruction, research that Kindergarteners entering Grade 1 were impacted the most severely, recognition that teachers will have to backtrack teaching curriculum as well as move forward, teacher shortages continuing to have an impact, the increased education gaps for the most vulnerable students, and the decreased number of students returning to in-person classrooms. Council members suggested utilizing ESSER dollars to implement systematic changes, address scheduling issues for older students, develop before and after school programs, improve transportation options, provide more structure for summer school programs, offer guidance for teachers, and continue supporting families and communities.

11. Iowa Department of Education update

Iowa Department of Education (Department) representative Brad Niebling (Chief, Bureau of Learner Strategies and Supports) provided updates.

Niebling shared information about Future Ready Iowa from birth to Grade 12. The Department has a leading priority of ensuring that all learners are Future Ready at all ages and stages of growth. ESSER funds are being leveraged to partner with districts, and the Department is building out networks to achieve these goals. The Department will support one set of evidence-based practices and tools statewide.

Niebling continued with a summary of the ESSER III funds and how they will be distributed. Funded district projects may select interventions from lists of the nationally peer-reviewed clearinghouses.

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Next, Niebling gave an update on the Iowa Dyslexia Board. The board was established to guide, facilitate, and oversee the implementation of dyslexia instruction in Iowa as well as make recommendations for increased improvement. At the first meeting, held September 1, the board worked on administrative procedures.

Lastly, Niebling described the Iowa e-Learning Central. The Department has developed an online information exchange that houses resources and support for educators, families, and students. The website is a repository to access courses, and it provides a platform for schools to offer online courses to other schools.

12. Assignment of homework (IRRC)

Chair Katie Greving described the assignment for the December 2021 meeting. Council members are asked to share an IRRC activity or project with their stakeholder group. At the next meeting, they will be asked to describe what they shared and the reaction to it. This may include social media.

13. Adjourn

Chair Katie Greving asked for any comments or questions. Greving commented that the IRRC has done more to address dyslexia issues than anyone in the state and encouraged the Council to inform their groups of the Center's valuable work.

The other meetings this fiscal year are scheduled for December 3, 2021, and May 4, 2022. On a motion by Jon Sheldahl, seconded by Kathleen Konrardy, the meeting was adjourned at 2:04 p.m. with zero "no" votes.