



## Student Reading Success Through Research and Collaboration

### Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC)

#### Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

December 7, 2022

10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, and Videoconference

**Members present:** Beth Ades-Hanson, Beth Happe, Kathleen Konrardy, Sherry Petty, Erin Sale, Michael Scott, Cori Stanley, John Speer, Deanna Stoube, Mindy VanZuiden, Shane Williams, Kathy Bertsch

**Additional attendees:** Nina Lorimor-Easley, Assistant Director for Education and Outreach, IRRC; Ben Walizer, Interim Director of Operations and Project Management, IRRC; Rachel Wallace, Administrative Services Coordinator, IRRC

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#### **1. Call to order**

The meeting was called to order by IRRC Advisory Council Chair Shane Williams at 10 a.m.

#### **2. Approval of agenda**

On a motion by John Speer, seconded by Michael Scott, the agenda for the meeting was approved with zero “no” votes.

#### **3. Approval of May 2022 meeting minutes**

On a motion by Kathleen Konrardy, seconded by Erin Sale, the May 2022 meeting minutes were approved with zero “no” votes.

#### **4. Member introductions**

Members of the Advisory Council introduced themselves.

#### **5. Public comment**

No public comments.

#### **6. University of Iowa College of Education updates**

Ben Walizer updated the council on the IRRC’s recent review. The Board of Regents, State of Iowa, requires each regent university to periodically review each center or institute. Walizer discussed who comprised the review committee, the IRRCs self-study that was conducted beforehand, and the formal three-day on-site review process. The most significant priority identified by the review committee was to hire a permanent IRRC director.



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Shane Williams went into further detail about the logistics of the review process and how it was the committee's responsibility to synthesize stakeholder input. It was the committee's duty to identify recurring themes and priorities and to inform the search for the next director. In closing, Williams mentioned those who have had direct involvement with the IRRC are impressed by the center's high-quality tools and resources. Conversely, those who have not had direct involvement may not even know the IRRC exists. Williams suggested doing a better job of marketing and making sure the IRRC is more recognized across the state.

Kathy Bertsch mentioned viewing this review as a continuous improvement effort. The IRRC is a legislative body, but the center is hosted by the university. Having multiple stakeholders presents challenges. Bertsch stated that she thinks the review will really help the IRRC focus its work to meet the demands of various stakeholders while still staying true to the message of the science of reading.

Walizer noted that the review committee has a responsibility to produce a written report which will be shared at the next advisory council meeting.

### **7. Iowa Department of Education updates**

Kathy Bertsch discussed progress on literacy statewide. There was a drop in the percentage of students meeting benchmarks. The Department of Education is watching and working on improving outcomes. In the last month, the Department released the list of schools that are designated for federal assistance due to low achievement among certain groups of students under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Some of the work they will be doing includes data review, resource allocation review, self-assessment of multi-tiered system of supports, with an action plan to be developed by June. Most of the participating schools have universal needs. Shane Williams added that perhaps the IRRC could help extended comprehensive schools (schools that do not meet certain improvement criteria within three years) adopt and implement an evidence-based literacy practice.

### **8. IRRC assistant director's report**

Nina Lorimor-Easley stated that the first Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement cohort that will be completing the program at the University of Iowa met for the final time in early December 2022. Cohort members represent all regions of the state. Lorimor-Easley explained the components and requirements of the program. She noted that the assessment practicum component of the program sets the University of Iowa apart and is one of the most beneficial pieces. The second cohort consisting of eight students began during the Fall 2022 semester. One student does not plan to continue. Once the second cohort completes the program, someone from each Area Education Agency (AEA) will have earned the endorsement. The second cohort will begin holding monthly meetings at the IRRC in Iowa City February of 2023. Lorimor-Easley stated that one of the goals for the IRRC is to get the program accredited by the International Dyslexia Association. There are

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requirements that the current University of Iowa program does not meet. Easley explained how the program will need to change in order to meet the IDA requirements for accreditation.

Cori Stanley asked if scholarships exist for the endorsement. Ben Walizer stated that students from the many in the financial support from their employer. Enrollment differences between the first and second cohorts were likely due to the cost of tuition for the program. Walizer was unaware of any agencies in the state offering to cover tuition for employees, but added that Decoding Dyslexia Iowa was going to make a legislative ask to provide the IRRC with some funding to provide scholarships.

Nina Lorimor-Easley informed the Council that other institutions can now apply to the IRRC to offer Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement programs at their institutions. She mentioned information about the application process can be found on the IRRC's website and outlined the Knowledge Practice Standards (KPS) that other programs will be required to meet. Iowa code states the IRRC has the authority to review and approve future Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement programs. The IRRC's philosophy is to help other institutions get approved. Programs also must be approved by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners and, ultimately, the Iowa Department of Education.

Lorimor-Easley explained that individuals who meet the requirements for the Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement but have not gone through the University of Iowa endorsement program can now apply to receive the endorsement. This manner for obtaining the endorsement was added to the legislative rules in 2022. There are three people in the state who have obtained the endorsement in this manner. Lorimor-Easley stated if individuals meet the other requirements for the endorsement but are missing the assessment practicum, they will be allowed to join the University of Iowa's assessment practicum in order to fulfill the missing requirement.

Walizer recognized Lorimor-Easley for her efforts with the Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement program over the past year. Walizer mentioned that new staff will be starting in January 2023 to help Lorimor-Easley with the endorsement coursework. When asked how school districts will know who the specialist is working for their regional AEAs, Williams said the AEAs are still discussing how to formally release that information. Bertsch added that they do not want the specialists to be overwhelmed and Williams noted that the smallest AEA serves 25,000 students.

### **9. IRRC interim director's report**

Ben Walizer outlined legislative priorities for the IRRC as written in Iowa code, Council responsibilities, stakeholders served by the IRRC, organizational structure of the IRRC. Walizer outlined the goals for the Council - to review priorities the IRRC has set for the year, review the work the center has accomplished, and provide input on hiring a director for the center. In the event the IRRC needs to review proposals from external groups or other agencies, the Council



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would provide feedback to make sure legislative priorities are met. Walizer mentioned that the Council bylaws should be reviewed after a new director is hired.

During the center review, the IRRC identified that it needed to be more intentional with its organizational structure. In July when former Director Dr. Deborah Reed left, most of the expertise left with her. Walizer stated that a goal of his over the past few months has been to find experts and build up the teams around them. In the event a director or assistant director were to leave, the IRRC would not be left without qualified staff. Walizer reviewed the IRRC's current organizational structure and full-time staff's job duties. Walizer praised the IRRC's student employees.

The IRRC's legislative report describes the center's work in 2022. Projects included:

- The IRRC finished Year 1 of a Tier 2 intervention research project. Dr. Reed received an Institute of Education Sciences grant for Varied Practice Reading. Testing of Varied Practice Reading in middle schools began in spring 2022, in collaboration with the Iowa City, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, and Sioux City Community School Districts. The IES-funded project for middle school VPR has been moved to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, with Dr. Reed.
- The IRRC conducted a writing assessment research project with Pleasant Valley Community School District in the spring. Writing topics were researched to be used when conducting pre- and post-test writing evaluations for research projects to see if responses are at the grade level we expect them to be. The research project included kindergarten through Grade 6.
- This summer the IRRC completed a summer research study with rising kindergartners, similar to the Varied Practice Reading study. Preschoolers were enrolled at local Head Start programs. Participants were prescreened for signs that they may struggle to read, and those students were delivered the intervention. Results indicated eight weeks is an insufficient amount of time for Head Start or pre-kindergarten students to be taught comprehensive topics, and classroom management challenges were also present.
- Also during the summer, the IRRC conducted an audit of eLearning courses to make sure they meet web accessibility standards (e.g., keyboard functionality, videos have controls that can start/stop, captioning). Any user across the state regardless of accessibility needs are able to complete the eLearning courses. There is one final course to update.
- Walizer mentioned that the IRRC is moving all Digital Varied Practice Reading content out of the current platform (Moodle) and into an application built by the IRRC computer programming team. The design is something that will hopefully be engaging for children.

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The backbone of the intervention remains the same, but the hope is that the new design is more fun for the students.

- This fall the IRRC developed a partnership with the University of Iowa College of Education's Teacher Leader Center and its master's degree in teaching, learning, and cultural competence. The IRRC has heard from stakeholders that they would like to see the 18 hours of Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement program coursework be applied to a master's program. This partnership now allows 12 hours to be applied to a 31-credit hour master's program.
- Staff continued to deliver professional development across the state. The IRRC is trying to get its experts out in the field as much as possible. Dr. Reed had been doing this until her departure, and Nina Lorimor-Easley was a keynote speaker at this year's Decoding Dyslexia Iowa Conference. Lorimor-Easley is in the process of creating her own dyslexia simulation that she can deliver as professional development.
- The eLearning Effective Literacy Instruction course was overhauled. Dr. Reed wrote updated content and we added new cartoons and functionality to make it more engaging.
- The IRRC began developing an eLearning Assistive Technology course. The IRRC receives about 50 meetings per year in AT and include in-person and virtual meetings. Parents and/or students will automatically be enrolled in the course so that they have ongoing access to training, etc.
- Launching two online learning communities. One for students who are graduating and have finished the endorsement and another online learning for general questions/comments and have a more passive way to engage in the IRRC resources that are available.
- Continued to publish blog posts. Recently, a psychologist from the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health blogged about dyslexia and mental health.
- Remained active on social media, particularly on Twitter.

Walizer concluded with summarizing the IRRC's scope of work for the remainder of 2022 and into 2023:

- Create an eLearning course for caregivers that includes a glossary of terms like "multi-tiered system of supports," "structured literacy," etc. The module is meant to be useful to caregivers in general.
- Create an eLearning course for educators about how to use a universal screener.

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- Create an eLearning course about how to implement structured literacy in a universal classroom.
- Create a 15- and 30-hour credit renewal course for the Area Education Agencies.
- Provide access to LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training opportunities for in-state teachers.
- Create asynchronous versions of endorsement courses that will be offered through the Master of Arts in Teaching, Leadership & Cultural Competency (MATLCC) at the University of Iowa College of Education.
- Develop undergraduate science of reading workshops.
- Conduct an assessment of statewide literacy upon request from the Iowa Dyslexia Board.
- Develop tools that help districts select literacy programs and curriculums.

John Speer asked if the IRRC will ever take a stance on a particular literacy curriculum. Walizer said the IRRC could create its own set of standards or a rubric for districts to use when choosing a curriculum. The IRRC would not explicitly endorse a program. Shane Williams stated that this would be helpful at a local level. He said the endorsement of the IRRC provides a lot of credibility.

Walizer mentioned IRRC staff achievements from the past year. Ben Stone was recognized as Student Employee of the Year for the entire University of Iowa campus. Stone helped build tools that the IRRC uses for writing, reading, and fluency assessments for research. In October, Dr. Reed was recognized by Decoding Dyslexia Iowa as a Dyslexia Champion in the state, the first time that the organization had bestowed such an honor. In November, Lorimor-Easley passed the Knowledge and Practice Examination for Effective Reading Instruction (KPEERI) offered through the Center for Effective Literacy Instruction. Lorimor-Easley was also featured on an episode of Iowa Public Radio's *River to River*.

Mindy VanZuiden asked if there was any homeschool representation as far as the IRRC's stakeholders are concerned. Walizer stated that there is nothing formal, but the IRRC has talked extensively about how to support homeschool educators. VanZuiden stated there are a lot of students leaving public schools because they do not feel they are being served. She said they are entering homeschool assistance programs and teachers are not necessarily any more equipped to help them.

### 10. Adjourn

On a motion by Michael Scott, seconded by John Speer, the meeting adjourned at 1:52 p.m. with zero "no" votes.