

Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

October 25, 2023

1:30 p.m.—3 p.m.

Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, and Videoconference

Members Present: Beth Ades-Hanson, Beth Happe, Kathleen Konrardy, John Speer, Sherry Petty, McKenzie Snow, Cori Stanley, Mindy VanZuiden

Additional Attendees: Nina Lorimor-Easley, Assistant Director of Education and Outreach, IRRC; Stephanie Edgren, Education and Outreach Coordinator, IRRC; Lindsay Seydel, Education and Outreach Coordinator, IRRC; Ben Walizer, Interim Director of Operations and Project Management, IRRC; Rachel Wallace, Administrative Services Specialist, IRRC; Qian Wang, Associate Director of Research and Evaluation, IRRC; Kim Buryanek, Division Administrator, Iowa Department of Education; April Gosselink-Lemke, Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education; Leigh Belville, Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education; Wanda Steuri, Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education; Tom Wood, Bureau Chief, Iowa Department of Education

Guests: Greg Feldmann, Administrative Consultant, Iowa Department of Education

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by IRRC Interim Director of Operations and Project Management Ben Walizer at 1:34 p.m.

2. Review of meeting outcomes

Ben Walizer highlighted the initial meeting agenda items, including allotted time for public comments and elections for a new chair and vice-chair of the council.

3. Approval of agenda

On a motion by Sherry Petty, seconded by Mindy VanZuiden, the agenda for the meeting was approved with zero “no” votes.

4. Approval of December 2022 meeting minutes

On a motion by John Speer, seconded by Mindy VanZuiden, the December 2022 meeting minutes were approved with zero “no” votes.

5. Public comment

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No public comments.

6. Review of council roles

Preceding the vote for chair and vice-chair of the council, Ben Walizer clarified the general roles and responsibilities of both positions according to the IRRC bylaws. Walizer also broke down the more specific activities in the coming year in which the chair and vice-chair may be involved, including the ongoing search for a new IRRC director in 2024. Council members proposed to delay the vote until later in the meeting.

7. Iowa Department of Education presentation

McKenzie Snow, director of the Iowa Department of Education, introduced the Department's presentation by clarifying the positive impacts of the science of reading (SOR) on educators and students in Iowa. Snow also spoke briefly about her relevant work in the field of literacy and her commitment to evidence-based reading instruction. Snow served as the Deputy Secretary of Education in Virginia, where she was involved in ensuring the effective implementation of individualized evidence-based literacy interventions and promoted the use of the SOR. Snow's background also extends to policy development as it relates to literacy as she has focused on closing the achievement gap among students, especially those who may experience a disadvantage in English literacy.

Kim Buryanek, Tom Wood, and Greg Feldmann reviewed the stagnation of proficiency in Iowa readers below the desired benchmark of >80%. The Department defined the science of reading as an amalgamation of research from several areas used to help educators maximize literacy outcomes of students. The team detailed the development and implementation of SOR, including how Scarborough's Rope is used as an essential model for addressing struggles with literacy in conjunction with sequential, systematic, and explicit instruction. The Department provided several examples of successful actualization of the SOR in other states, including North Carolina and Alabama, and most prominently, Mississippi. The Department intends to provide purposeful leadership for educators in the coming years as measures are rolled out but looks to the IRRC advisory council for support in SOR implementation moving forward.

8. IRRC year in review

Ben Walizer introduced the IRRC with a brief overview of the staff, structural makeup, and legislative involvement. Walizer then discussed outreach initiatives, including eLearning professional development, the Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement Program, and individualized work with districts to address their unique needs. In recent months, the IRRC has also expanded its professional development workshops to include topics such as writing development and intensive reading instruction.

Currently and looking forward, the IRRC is highly focused on the use of adaptable standardized surveys and data reporting to assess the effectiveness and quality of curriculum in relation to the SOR. Although the IRRC does not intend to endorse or oppose certain curriculums, it looks to provide a guiding set of standards for teachers to reference as they search for the optimal curriculums for their classroom. When working with districts, the IRRC also provides fidelity monitoring to ensure the correct implementation of curriculums.

In the 2023 calendar year, the IRRC hosted a series of dyslexia training workshops for students in the UI teacher education program, as well as the first-ever Iowa Science of Reading Summit, both of which it plans to expand to reach more educators and specialists in 2024. Additionally, Walizer notes that the IRRC presented a similar message to that of the Department of Education when meeting with Iowa legislators earlier this year. The IRRC aims to support legislators in making informed decisions on laws regarding the SOR.

9. Nominations for chair and vice-chair of the advisory committee

Council members agreed to postpone a vote for the chair and vice-chair until the following meeting.

10. Adjourn

On a motion by Ben Walizer, seconded by Mindy VanZuiden, the meeting adjourned at 3:02 p.m. with zero “no” votes.