

Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2024

1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, and Videoconference

Members Present: Mindy VanZuiden, Cori Stanley, Beth Happe, Erick Pruitt, Stacey Cole, MacKenzie Snow, Sherry Petty (virtual), Beth Ades-Hanson (virtual)

Additional Attendees: Qian Wang, Associate Director of Research and Evaluation, IRRC; Ben Walizer, Interim Director of Operations and Project Management, IRRC; Nina Lorimor-Easley, Associate Director of Education and Outreach, IRRC; Nikki Hodous, Associate Director of Operations and Project Management, IRRC; and Kim Buryanek, Division Administrator, Iowa Department of Education

Guests: None

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by Mindy VanZuiden at 1:08 p.m.

2. Approval of agenda

On a motion by Pruitt, seconded by Walizer, the agenda for the meeting was approved with zero “no” votes.

3. Approval of November 2023 meeting minutes

On a motion by Happe, seconded by Stanley, the November 2023 meeting minutes were approved with zero “no” votes.

4. Public comment

No public comments

5. Updates from the Iowa Department of Education

Snow provided updates following the close of the legislative session. Snow discussed the significant progress toward advancing HF 2618, which aimed to modify teacher preparation programs, provide personalized performance plans for students, and allow caregiver discretion regarding the retention of

their student if they are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. The DE has received multiple requests for best practices for personalized learning plans and will look to the IRRRC for expertise on this.

Snow shared that the DE is getting ready to launch the third round of LETRS training in August, and it anticipates that this will be the largest group yet. LETRS training has been opened up for second-year participants and preschool teachers for early LETRS training as well. The DE has been receiving very positive feedback on the high quality intensive training it has provided.

Ades-Hanson asked if the DE is seeing the entire staff of certain schools participating in LETRS. Snow responded that it is mostly seeing coordinated efforts within districts; some districts have had all first-grade teachers participate, followed by second-grade teachers, and so on, to ensure they have tiered coverage. Other districts have had all K-3 teachers participate, with the intention of expanding training to later grades or to title/special education teachers who did not participate in the first round of training.

VanZuiden inquired whether the DE will be collecting and compiling data from participating individuals. Snow confirmed that the DE is collecting data and receiving feedback. They want to know whether teachers feel their knowledge is increasing and whether they feel comfortable with implementation. In later years, the DE intends to look at how LETRS impacted student learning across the districts. The DE will look to the IRRRC to support research on the impact of LETRS.

Snow provided an update on the current process for reviewing the English Language Arts state standards. They have not been reviewed or revised substantially since 2010. Technical updates were made in 2012. Review has started with a focus group selected from a pool of applicants including a wide range of content experts, educators, administrators, higher education faculty, and others. The group reviewed standards by grade bands and made recommendations based on best practices, research, and review needs based on fields. The group has led three hybrid listening sessions on the first proposed standards and issued a broad, state-wide public survey for individuals to comment on each standard.

This week, the DE is convening the second review committee. Individuals were selected from a pool of applicants, including content experts, educators, community-based providers, higher education faculty, and private partners. This group will make any additional revisions based on listening sessions to create a second draft of the proposed standards. This draft will go before the state board of education, most likely next month, for a first read-through of the drafted state standards. Another opportunity for public comment will occur. At a following state board of education meeting, the standards will be reviewed for a final time and will then be voted on for adoption. Snow anticipates the standards will be finalized later this summer. The DE intends to have professional development for district and classroom leaders for guidance on implementing the standards.

6. Updates from the Iowa Reading Research Center

Walizer provided a variety of updates from the IRRRC including:

- **IRRC director search update:** Finalists were interviewed a few weeks ago. The IRRRC appreciated having diverse perspectives from the search committee. The IRRRC is looking forward to an announcement of the new director in the coming weeks and anticipates a midsummer start date.
- **IRRC content and services:**

- The IRRC has worked with additional groups, including the University of Iowa College of Education, to provide ongoing training on dyslexia.
- The IRRC podcast *A Novel Idea* has had 30,000–40,000 downloads. The IRRC launched a new podcast this spring called *Speaking of Literacy*. For this podcast, two undergraduate students studying communication sciences and disorders are creating episodes that show the connections between speech, language, and reading. SLPs play a key role in the development of oral language and pre-reading skills, which are critical for later reading development.
- The IRRC blogposts have had a recent focus on the use of MTSS and grouping in core instruction. Recent posts have been shared by well-known leaders in the field. As a result, recent posts have been the most popular in IRRC history. The IRRC will continue to create content around these themes.
- The research article of the month continues to help educators, caregivers, and school leaders understand the implications of research on their work, especially relating to interventions and instructional strategies that can be used in practice.
- The IRRC and faculty in the UI College of Education Special Education Department are collaboratively building a handwriting tool called LIFTER (Letter Identification and Formation for Transcription and Early Reading). Handwriting instruction supports the development of reading skills such as letter recognition, grapheme-phoneme correspondance, and word reading. LIFTER helps address common concerns expressed by teachers by providing engaging videos and accompanying worksheets for each letter that can be downloaded and sorted according to the scope and sequence of a particular reading curriculum. LIFTER will also include a training module to help instructors learn how to implement the tool in their classroom. Currently, work is being done to include Spanish graphemes. LIFTER will be available to all on the IRRC website. It will launch during the summer and be highlighted at the summit.
- Walizer highlighted the PD services provided by the IRRC education and outreach team. Since 2022, the IRRC has focused on direct support to districts within the state. The IRRC has met with 30 districts this year, conducting approximately 70 visits and PD sessions. Presenting at the statewide curriculum meeting has led to major interest from districts wanting to work with the IRRC. In particular, the IRRC is seeing increased interest from secondary educators. One goal of the IRRC is to identify how to expand services beyond our current capacity with four education and outreach staff members.
- Fidelity monitoring is being piloted this term with a school district. The IRRC will then work to develop fidelity monitoring for the most common curricula in the state to help schools with implementation and integration. Fidelity monitoring helps identify opportunities to provide additional support to schools, including opportunities for PD from IRRC staff. Cole asked if the IRRC had considered partnering with the DE to offer fidelity monitoring to schools in comprehensive status. Snow agreed with the feedback, stating that fidelity monitoring builds upon the DE's work while leveraging the IRRC's expertise.
- The Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement program continues, with the application for the fourth cohort closing in June. The funding to help offset the cost for participants was not approved by the legislature. The UI program that is led by IRRC staff includes three semesters and one summer of coursework (18 credits) and two practicum experiences (one with assessing students and the other delivering interventions.) It is taught mostly

online, but meets in person once a month. Pruitt asked about the kinds of roles DSE graduates take on after completion of the program. Lorimor-Easley shared that graduates include AEA staff, curriculum directors, and instructional coaches. She also shared that the current cohort consists of all teachers or interventionists. Pruitt commented that it would be helpful to know what the district office could do to better understand dyslexia and support districts. Specifically, Pruitt asked how a principal could support a teacher with the endorsement and what changes could be made at the system level to support teachers. Happe suggested that this could be done through PD for administrators and instructional coaches.

- Lorimor-Easley shared about the inaugural Leading Literacy Change Academy for District Decision Makers on June 20. This is a free, one-day event designed to help district leaders make the shift from whole/balanced literacy to the science of reading utilizing change management. The IRRC will be partnering with Sterling to bring in the administrator experience to the change-management sessions.
- The IRRC is developing resources for schools to guide their summer school programs and data collection. In particular, the IRRC intends to provide guidance for summer programs for teachers of secondary students who struggle with word recognition. The new director will support the rollout.
- Walizer reviewed the current enrollment and completion of all eLearning modules through the IRRC. After July 1, 2024, the due date for current educators to complete the Dyslexia Overview module, the IRRC will update the module with guidance from the DE. Pruitt shared it would be helpful for the modules to have a specific focus for administrators, as current modules are mostly geared toward teachers in classrooms. For example, modules could help administrators understand elements of effective literacy instruction.
- Lorimor-Easley shared an update to the IRRC FastBridge tool, which was rolled out last year to provide teachers recommendations based on an individual student's FastBridge score. The tool will evolve to integrate the 4-box sort (i.e., fluent and accurate, fluent but not accurate, not fluent but accurate, neither fluent nor accurate) in addition to allowing teachers to upload data from an entire class. The tool will then sort all students into groups based on the 4-box sort and provide instructional recommendations and further diagnostics. A future phase of the tool will allow teachers to upload the diagnostic assessment results and receive further recommendations based on the new data. Pruitt inquired if this tool could be used to predict a student's performance on ISASP. Lorimor-Easley responded that it was unclear whether the tool could predict ISASP scores; however, fluency and comprehension skills should generally improve students' performance.
- Qian shared information regarding the upcoming project of the IRRC to review K-5 English and Language Arts Curriculum. This review will help school districts select curricula that are aligned with structured literacy. The IRRC plans to send a usability survey to teachers to gather their perceptions on the ease of implementing materials. Review teams will consist of educational professionals from districts. Each identified curriculum will be reviewed twice by two different teams, and a narrative summary will be created along with information detailing the scoring of materials. The Reading League has provided permission for the IRRC to utilize their materials to guide the review.

- **Upcoming priorities/areas of focus for the IRRC:** Walizer sought input from advisory council members on priorities and areas of focus for the 2025 scope of work. Members shared a variety of ideas, including:
 - Focus on instructional leadership.
 - Focus on aligning higher education/teacher preparation programs with evidence-based approaches to reading instruction. Snow stated that the HF 2545 statewide literacy plan should support this aim, as it will increase the use of systematic approaches to teaching vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension. The plan also requires teacher preparation programs to train educators to teach reading in a manner that is direct and systematic, specifically banning the use of three-cueing approaches to teaching reading.
 - Focus on supporting teachers and administrators who have completed LETRS training. Buryanek shared feedback received from over 2,500 individuals enrolled in LETRS for educators and 400 enrolled in LETRS for administration. She shared that 98% of respondents reported they were able to apply concepts and skills from LETRS in their schools. LETRS is showing strong efficacy in the early stages of the courses. She confirmed that we will receive more detailed reports later in the implementation process.
 - Focus on partnerships with CSI schools and schools identified for improvement.
 - Focus on research impacting practice and instruction.

7. Recognition of Outgoing Members

Walizer recognized the efforts and shared appreciation for outgoing IRRC Advisory Council Members Beth Ades-Hanson, Sherry Petty, and John Speer.

8. Nomination of Vice Chair

Walizer described the role and expectations of the vice chair of the IRRC Advisory Council. The floor was opened to nominations. Beth Happe was nominated and received a unanimous vote of approval for her appointment.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.