

Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

December 12, 2024

10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

B100, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, IA and Zoom

Members Present: Mindy VanZuiden (Chair), President, Decoding Dyslexia Iowa; Beth Happe (Vice-Chair), Principal, Martensdale-St. Mary's Community School District; Stacey Cole, Superintendent, Storm Lake Community School District; Erick Pruitt, Superintendent, Ankeny Community School District; Wanda Steuri, Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education; Papae Wymore, Lecturer at Central College; Gwen Marra, Professor, Dordt University; Jason Plourde, Chief Administrator, Green Hills Area Education Agency; McKenzie Snow, Director, Iowa Department of Education

Additional Attendees: Shawn Datchuk, Director, Iowa Reading Research Center; Leah Zimmermann, Research Fellow, Iowa Reading Research Center; Nikki Hodous, Associate Director of Operations & Project Management, Iowa Reading Research Center; Keller Young, Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Iowa Reading Research Center

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by Mindy VanZuiden.

2. Approval of agenda

On a motion by Erick Pruitt, seconded by Stacey Cole, the agenda for the meeting was approved with zero "no" votes.

3. Approval of April meeting minutes

On a motion by Pruitt, seconded by Papae Wymore, the September 2024 meeting minutes were approved with zero "no" votes.

4. Public comment

No public comments

5. Iowa Department of Education updates

Director McKenzie Snow summarized the current work of the Department of Education (DE). First, the DE has invested in decodable book packs for Grade 1 students across the state. The books are currently being shipped to schools. Each set of books has a QR code that links to videos that provide guidance on

their use in multiple languages. Cole asked if there is a deadline for when the books need to be claimed. Snow stated that there is no deadline, although some schools are hopeful to get the books home over the winter break. The books ordered were based on enrollment, but there are additional books on reserve through the publication company if additional books are needed. Additionally, there are books that will be made available for K–2 students in out-of-school programs (e.g., summer school, after school, etc.). The distribution of these books will be at the discretion of district superintendents.

Snow also shared updates on the recent federal grant that was awarded to the DE. This grant builds upon recent state legislation and will create a competitive grant process for school districts this upcoming spring. A local needs assessment will be used to build out local literacy plans at the district and building level. Some of the grant funding will also support teacher preparation programs and their alignment to the science of reading. The grants will have a 5-year funding period. Cole asked if there was a discussion of continuing to fund Amira (i.e., AI tutoring system). Snow said they are looking at sustaining the program moving forward, and are soliciting feedback on the program's impact.

Pruitt asked what restrictions there would be on the competitive funding grant for schools. Snow said there would be some federal and state restrictions and that specifics are still being defined. Key components will include: needs assessment, local literacy plan aligned to state literacy plan, focus on instructional leadership, and ties to state investments in literacy instruction.

Next, Snow shared updates from three committees that have been formed to discuss the comprehensive state literacy plan, graduation requirements, and updates to the ELA standards. There was discussion around the importance of alignment across these materials, state code, and the federal funding guidelines. Pruitt noted that the literacy framework will provide helpful guidance for stakeholders to support literacy development in schools. Snow mentioned that on the end-of-year interim report, there was a focus on universal instruction, MTSS, early childhood, and family/community relations. Steuri and Cole both highlighted the importance of early childhood and community engagement to students' literacy development. Snow stated that the committees will reconvene in the spring. The comprehensive literacy plan materials will include both a full-form plan and briefs/supplemental documents that will be useful at the classroom level.

Snow also mentioned recently released guidance documents on the personalized reading plans and the Foundations of Reading Assessment. Wymore asked if teacher educators will be able to access the Foundations of Reading Assessment. Steuri mentioned there is currently a sample assessment available. Snow mentioned that there may be test security concerns from Pearson to release the whole exam to teacher educators, but that the DE would explore ways that they may be able to provide that access. Currently, the DE is in the process of developing a self-assessment workbook and a webinar that will demonstrate what test results will look like to students.

Steuri shared updates on the dyslexia handbook development. She stated it has been reviewed by external consultants as well as the dyslexia board. The handbook will have sections for families and educators. Steuri said she was hopeful the handbook will be near final form by the February dyslexia board meeting so that it can begin the final approval process. Professional learning around the use of the handbook will be provided across the state once it is released. VanZuiden expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming dyslexia handbook.

Steuri also shared that round 5 of LETRS training has been completed, and that online access and materials would be available soon.

There was some conversation around dyslexia diagnosis processes, the dyslexia specialist endorsement training, and bridging conversations between clinicians, teachers, and families.

6. IRRC director's report

Shawn Datchuk reviewed the legislation and bylaws of the IRRC and the advisory council. He highlighted the center's legislative priorities and focus on translational science, or bridging the gap between research and practice. He also reviewed the "IRRC Core", the overlap of research, dissemination, technical assistance, and public policy, that are integral to each of the research projects being conducted at the IRRC.

Datchuk reviewed metrics from IRRC projects and initiatives since July 1. These included research articles published, grants submitted, presentations given, overview of 16 district data partnerships, and PD and technical assistance meetings provided and planned for spring. Communications and eLearning metrics included website traffic, popular blogs, updates to LITFTER, and course completions.

Datchuk explained the IRRC's focus on the use of evidence-based practices to inform decision-making and current research projects. Pruitt added the importance of incorporating district data in connection with research to help support research-based conversations with schools and stakeholders. Datchuk agreed, and stated that part of the work at the IRRC is to apply research to our local contexts. He highlighted the importance of the IRRC's partnerships and collaboration with districts in addition to research findings.

Datchuk provided an overview of current IRRC projects. All current projects incorporate the IRRC Core. The IRRC is requesting feedback from the advisory council on five projects.

- **CLIFTER:** Keller Young shared updates on the systematic review that is being conducted on interventions for cursive handwriting instruction. This review will examine the best methods for teaching cursive (e.g., different cursive handwriting styles) and explore relationships between handwriting instruction and student outcomes. Young also reviewed a recently published blog post, "Looping Back to Cursive Writing", which detailed preliminary findings of the systematic review. Additionally, preview videos of the upcoming CLIFTER tool were shared (late spring 2025 launch).
- **Caregiver Data Literacy:** Leah Zimmerman shared updates on the caregiver data literacy project. This project aims to create a streamlined process for caregivers interested in engaging with the IRRC. She highlighted the importance of meaningful collaboration with caregivers and schools in light of upcoming personalized reading plans and caregivers' involvement in literacy data. She previewed the caregiver module, which is on track for a January 2025 launch. She also shared a data discussion tool developed by the IRRC that parents and caregivers can use to guide conversations with school-based personnel. Finally, she shared updates on the two research components of the project: a systematic review of statewide literacy plans and a caregiver survey of literacy data (planned implementation spring 2025).

Wymore asked how the IRRC was planning to administer the survey and ensure that responses came from diverse populations within the state. Zimmerman responded that we are hopeful to have support from district partners and advisory council members to help administer the survey across the state. Jason Plourde mentioned considering ways to support teachers in these data conversations and suggested creating a similar document for data conversations available for teachers. Zimmerman and Datchuk responded that the IRRC is in the design phase of a school-facing document to support teachers in data conversations.

Steuri mentioned possible connections between these documents and the dyslexia handbook. Datchuk responded that these documents provide an opportunity to create consistency around terminology across stakeholders: clinicians, parents, and teachers. The survey will also provide helpful insight through caregiver feedback on how to support these conversations.

- **Measure FIRST:** Datchuk discussed the development of the Measure FIRST tool to support collaboration of teachers and instructional coaches in curriculum and intervention implementation. This tool will provide collaboration opportunities with districts to support fidelity monitoring in schools. IRRC staff is also conducting a systematic review of what fidelity alignment looks like for reading interventions. Datchuk walked through the current development of the tool and accompanying eLearning modules.

Steuri commented that the use of videos in the tool would be helpful in providing examples and non-examples of fidelity observation for training and calibration. Plourde suggested ways for the tool to develop in future iterations, from a checklist into a rubric. Datchuk agreed that this idea could be a potential avenue to pursue. He stated that the initial implementation of the tool will help to inform future practice.

Multiple members discussed the importance of the tool as collaborative and not evaluative for teachers. Pruitt commented that he sees this tool as informative at a systems, rather than classroom level. Datchuk agreed that this tool should be designed to support school leaders across a variety of contexts.

- **Core Data-Based Decision-Making (DBDM):** Datchuk reviewed the goals of the Core DBDM project, which supports districts as they make instructional decisions based on student data. He reviewed the current process for the data dashboards the IRRC is implementing with district partners. IRRC staff is also reviewing different decision rules from research. Pruitt provided feedback on the importance of intentional conversations around data. Datchuk noted this is an important first step in the IRRC being able to provide more tailored and specific support to districts.
- **Iowa Science of Reading Summit:** Datchuk shared updates about the upcoming Iowa Science of Reading Summit, including important dates, invited speakers, and details on applying to present.

7. Adjourn

On a motion by Pruitt, seconded by Plourde, the meeting adjourned.