

AUGUST 15, 2012

# IOWA READING RESEARCH CENTER

## Final Report



Submitted by the Iowa Reading Research Committee  
Appointed by the Iowa Department of Education

## Introduction

### *Sense of Urgency*

Much of a student's success in school and in life is dependent upon his or her ability to read. Numerous research studies have identified reading as a gateway skill – one in which students must gain proficiency in order to access much of a school's curriculum. Lack of reading proficiency has also been linked to lower graduation rates, higher juvenile and adult crime, and higher likelihood of unemployment.

Despite substantive efforts to improve reading achievement among Iowa school children, our trendlines are flat. In 2007-08, the percent of fourth-grade students proficient in reading based on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills was 77. In 2008-09, it was 81.2; in 2009-10, it was 78.5; and in 2010-11, it was 82.4. That pattern is similar at both eighth and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

Iowa's lackluster performance is also evident in examining results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Jason Glass, director of the Iowa Department of Education, cited Iowa's results on the NAEP as a call to action (Iowa Department of Education website 2012). Nationwide, results on the NAEP show substantial gains in key measures from 2009 to 2011; however, since the early 1990s, Iowa's long-term trend shows a troubling pattern of students, from disadvantaged and minority students to white, relatively affluent students, falling to the middle of the pack. Some additional facts about Iowa's NAEP scores include the following:

- Iowa's average score in fourth-grade reading (221) is lower than the state's score in 1992 (225) and is unchanged from the state's score in 2009 (221).
- Iowa's white students rank in the bottom 10 percent of states and jurisdictions nationally in eighth-grade reading and in the bottom 25 percent in fourth-grade reading, fourth-grade math and eighth-grade math.
- The gap in achievement between students in Iowa with and without disabilities is among the widest in the nation.

Additionally, a new study of international and state trends in student achievement shows Iowa with the "lowest rate of test score gains in the nation between 1992 and 2011," according to Education Next.

Iowa had the highest test scores in the country in 1992 among the 41 states studied, but now ranks in the middle of the pack, according to the report, "Achievement Growth: International and U.S. State Trends in Student Performance," released by Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance.

Without a doubt, there is a genuine sense of urgency among Iowans to improve the reading achievement of our students. Reading proficiency impacts every aspect of school success. Graduating literate young adults who are college and career ready is essential to the future of our nation. Thus, significant efforts to bring research to practice and increase the use of scientifically based practices in reading instruction are needed in Iowa.

### *Iowa Reading Research Center*

The 2012 Iowa Legislature established an Iowa Reading Research Center. Senate File 2284, Section 32, clearly establishes the purpose for the Center:

“The purpose of the center shall be to apply current research on literacy to provide for the development and dissemination of all of the following:

- a) Instructional strategies for prekindergarten through grade twelve to achieve literacy proficiency that includes reading, reading comprehension, and writing for all students.
- b) Strategies for identifying and providing evidence-based interventions for students, beginning in kindergarten, who are at risk of not achieving literacy proficiency.
- c) Models for effective school and community partnerships to improve student literacy.
- d) Reading assessments.
- e) Professional development strategies and materials to support teacher effectiveness in student literacy development.
- f) Data reports on attendance center, school district, and statewide progress toward literacy proficiency in the context of student, attendance center, and school district demographic characteristics.
- g) An intensive summer literacy program. The center shall establish program criteria and guidelines for implementation of the program by school districts, under rules adopted by the state board.

The legislation also identifies that the Center’s first focus should be kindergarten through grade three.

### *Reading Research Committee*

To gather input from a variety of stakeholders, the Iowa Department of Education convened a Reading Research Committee. The Committee was charged with creating a detailed description and recommendations, based on SF 2284, of the specific functions and structures necessary to establish the Iowa Reading Research Center. The Committee’s report is due to the Iowa Department of Education by August 15, 2012. Sharon Kurns, regional director for Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA), was

selected to serve as the chair of the Committee. Members were selected to represent a broad representation of organizations and institutions involved in supporting reading practices in the state. Membership includes the following:

- Iowa Department of Education Representatives: David Tilly, Ph.D., Deputy Director; Michelle Hosp, Ph.D., Rtl State Transformation Team Representative; Barbara Ohlund, Ph.D., Rtl State Transformation Team Representative; Rita Martens, Lead Consultant, Iowa Core; Christine Rauscher, Ph.D., Reading Consultant; Deb Hindman, Literacy Consultant; Mike Cormack and Phil Wise, Policy Liaisons; Sandy Nelson, Special Education Innovation and Improvement Consultant; Lea Davidson, Bureau Chief, Standards and Curriculum
- IASCD Representatives: Susan Pecinovsky, Ed.D., and Lou Howell
- AEA Representatives: Kris Donnelly, Programs and Services Administrator, AEA 10; and Barb Shafer, Consultant, AEA 267
- Regents Universities Representatives: John Hosp, Ph.D., University of Iowa; Salli Forbes, Ph.D., Deborah Tidwell, Ph.D., and Rick Traw, Ed.D., University of Northern Iowa; Ralph Reynolds, Ph.D., Iowa State University
- Non-Regent IHE Representative: Lindsay Grow, Ph.D., Grand View University
- ISEA Representatives: Mike Beranek and Tania Johnson
- At-large reading experts from Iowa: Wendy Robinson, Heartland AEA; Shari Kuehl, Davenport CSD
- Charlie Bruner, Ph.D., Director, Iowa Child and Family Policy Center
- Clark Goltz, Executive Director, Iowa Reading Association

### *Current Work in Iowa*

During the two meetings of the Reading Research Committee, members discussed the current work to support literacy in Iowa. Members identified a broad array of efforts, including the Iowa Core and the work that is currently being done across multiple AEAs and school districts to facilitate teams of teachers collaborating to understand the new standards. Additionally, the Committee acknowledges the work of our teacher preparation programs, the many professional learning programs implemented across the state by the Iowa Department of Education, AEAs, and Iowa school districts, the leadership of teachers and administrators, school and community programs, and efforts to engage families in supporting their children's literacy achievement. Despite these efforts, the outcomes we are currently achieving are not acceptable. The Committee recognizes that future efforts must build on initiatives that positively influence student achievement while also making appropriate changes in order to see significant gains in reading achievement.

## Recommendation to Discuss and Define Key Concepts

The Committee recognizes the complexities involved in understanding and using research in the area of reading. Conversations and consensus regarding the theoretical orientation supporting the work of the Center and the terms used in communication by the Center will provide clarity and cohesiveness for future work. The Committee does not believe this could be accomplished in the short time given to formulate its recommendations. Rather, it recommends that this become the work of the Center and that the Director, with assistance from the Advisory Council, address this as part of the early work of the Center.

Examples of areas to address include the following:

### *Research to Practice:*

The Committee recommends an orientation focused on “Research to Practice.” The work of the Center needs to focus on efforts that result in scientifically based practices being used in our schools, community programs, and in parent support of their children’s learning. The Committee recommends that it be clearly communicated that the role of the Center is to engage in development and dissemination, not to conduct research. What is meant by “Research to Practice” needs to be defined and clarified as the main function of the Center.

### *Scientifically Based:*

The term “scientifically based research and practice” is interpreted differently by stakeholders. To some, it is a specific term referring to research that is purely quantitative with a rigorous experimental design. Others would use a broader definition that included rigorously designed research projects that use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches to data collection and analysis. A common definition of this term must be articulated and clearly understood by stakeholders across Iowa.

### *Evidence-Based Practices:*

The Committee was uncertain as to whether or not the terms “scientifically based” and “evidence-based” should be used interchangeably. In its simplest form, evidence-based reading instruction means that a particular program or collection of instructional practices has a record of success. That is, there is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence to suggest that when the program is used with a particular group of children, the children can be expected to make adequate gains in reading achievement (International Reading Association 2012). Does this imply the existence of “scientifically based research” about the

practice or are there other acceptable methods to demonstrate evidence of effectiveness? This needs to be defined and a decision made about which terms will be used.

*Theoretical Basis for Literacy Instruction:*

Theories about effective reading instruction are formed by using the research to formulate practices, apply them to the context of the schools and classrooms, and match them to the needs of students we serve. While the Committee recognizes there is solid scientifically based research available about effective practices, there remain discrepancies in the way that the research is applied and the practices that result. It will be important to identify these discrepancies and to have clear guidelines and communication about effective practice from the Center.

## **Recommendations Regarding the Position of Director**

The Committee recommends that a Director for the Iowa Reading Research Center be hired using appropriated funds. Additionally, access to a clerical support person should be provided for the Director. The Iowa Department of Education, the host site, and the IRRC Advisory Council will all have input into the evaluation of the Director's effectiveness. The Committee also recognizes that hiring a Director during the academic year may be difficult due to availability. In that case it is suggested that the Iowa Department of Education consider an Interim Director.

*Responsibilities of the Director will include:*

- Achieve the IRRC's mission and purpose
- Direct the Center's budget
- Manage and oversee the Request For Proposal (RFP) process and results
- Access appropriate instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques for Iowa teachers, leaders, and community members to promote literacy achievement
- Identify promising and effective public and private partnerships for literacy advancement in the state of Iowa and foster their diffusion
- Collect and disseminate appropriate instructional strategies for Iowa educators and communities to positively impact student learning
- Collect and disseminate professional development strategies and materials to support teacher effectiveness in student literacy development
- Establish methods for collection of school-wide data, report development, and analysis of progress toward literacy proficiency

- Facilitate establishment of models for an intensive summer literacy program replicable in Iowa schools
- Collaborate with higher education institutions and other statewide organizations in disseminating literacy research and evidence and supporting continuous improvement and knowledge development at the school and community level
- Submit interim and annual reports to the Iowa Department of Education
- Manage Center support staff
- Utilize technology for dissemination of information and communication

*The Committee suggests the Director have the following qualifications and background experiences:*

- Expertise in the field of literacy in research, implementation, instructional strategies and practices, interventions, and assessment (as many of these areas as possible)
- Budget development and management experience
- Administration and scientific research design and methodology experience
- Knowledge and experience in working with families and communities to promote reading and literacy and establish school and community partnerships
- Demonstrated experience as a proven leader in professional learning and teacher development
- Experience in grant writing or the development of resource streams to develop funds and resources for the IRRC
- Involvement with foundations
- Familiarity with the Iowa Core and the Iowa Professional Development Model
- Ability to access state and national expertise to further the efforts of the IRRC

*The Committee recommended the following educational requirements for the Director:*

- Earned doctoral degree in reading, early literacy education, or a related field preferred. (Experiences commensurate with requirements and qualifications.)

## **Recommendations Regarding the Host Site for the IRRC**

- Preferential consideration shall be given to the Director for selection of the host site.
- The host site shall be at an AEA, a public school district in Iowa, or the AEA system as required by the structure of the legislation.

- The Iowa Department of Education, with input from the Advisory Committee, will select the Director, but the Director and the support personnel will become employees of the host site. (Host will hold contract, issue pay, benefits, etc.)
- The host site will act as the fiscal agent for the IRRC.
- The Iowa Department of Education will have oversight for the IRRC and the host site.
- The host site will provide an office with phone, Internet access, and other technology as needed with costs covered by the appropriation.

## **Recommendations Regarding the IRRC Advisory Council**

### *Responsibilities of the Advisory Council:*

- Serve as advisors to the Iowa Department of Education and the Director of the IRRC to bring the Center's vision and mission to fruition
- Stay abreast of emerging trends, research, and effective literacy practices
- Continually review the Center's priorities and projects
- Address issues of duplication of effort across the state
- Assist the Director to review proposals for quality, viability, and impact
- Foster collaboration across the Iowa reading research and evaluation community and serve as a facilitator in identifying additional research needs and ways to apply research to practice in Iowa schools and communities.
- Evaluate the effects of the various projects and activities of the Center
- Provide input to the host and the Iowa Department of Education on the performance evaluation of the Director

### *Structure of Advisory Council:*

- Appointed by Iowa Department of Education
- Composed of representatives with expertise in literacy from the Iowa Department of Education, AEAs, Regents and private colleges and universities, public schools, accredited nonpublic schools, and statewide literacy and professional organizations or agencies, including community and parent representatives and those with particular expertise on school and community partnerships and on addressing the targeted and intensive needs of certain students
- Meet at least quarterly
- Follow open meeting laws

## Recommendations Regarding Decision-Making Framework

### *Continuous Improvement*

It is recommended that the Director and the Advisory Council consider activities in the context of a continuous improvement process. The work of the Center has been defined by legislation, but the Director with the Advisory Committee will need to assess needs to prioritize and identify which tasks or activities will be planned and implemented. They will also need to monitor implementation, evaluate the effects of any activities, and use this evaluation information to revise and adjust implementation of activities and communicate to the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Legislature, and the public about the effects of the IRRC.

### *Decision-Making Criteria*

The following criteria for prioritizing projects were defined by the Committee.

1. Clearly aligns to the legislation (SF 2284 states that this activity matches the defined purposes of the Center. Any work undertaken by the Center must meet this criterion.)
2. Results in sustainable principles and practices
3. Founded on scientifically based research (research done with strong methodology)
4. Assists to organize, manage, or streamline current practices
5. Yields result in high return on investment
6. Aligns to the Iowa Core
7. Allows for collaboration across groups in Iowa
8. Measures results through clear evaluation
9. Fosters continuous improvement across schools in Iowa and the use of data and experience to produce change
10. Implemented through Iowa Professional Development Model (includes theory, demonstration, practice, coaching, collaboration, implementation monitoring, and evaluation of results)

It is recommended that the Advisory Council develop a process to use needs assessment data to determine the highest priority needs in literacy for the state and then to use these criteria, or a modification of them, to consider specific tasks or projects. Those projects that most closely align with these criteria should be implemented first.

## Recommendations Regarding 2012-13 Center Work

### *Conduct Needs Assessments to Determine Future Activities of the Center*

The Committee recommends that the Center conduct a needs assessment to determine the current state literacy instructional practices in Iowa schools. This includes teacher knowledge of the curriculum, instructional practice, and content knowledge about reading instruction. This needs assessment will involve classroom observations, interviews with teachers, parents, and students.

- Development of needs assessment questions
- Development of data collection protocols
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Data interpretation to determine priority work for the Center

It is recommended that the Director, with input from the Advisory Council, develop an RFP to seek an entity or a consortium to design the needs assessment, conduct the needs assessment, and prepare a written report with data analysis and interpretation.

Estimated Budget: \$300,000-\$400,000

### *Begin Initial Work of the Center*

While the needs assessment is being conducted, a set of activities should be put in place that will accomplish some of the immediate tasks as identified in the legislation and build a dissemination system to provide teachers of Iowa with resources and information identified or developed by the IRRC. The following suggestions were identified by the Committee:

- Review current literature, visit schools that have shown themselves to be successful in improving student achievement in reading to identify effective literacy practices (not programs), and advocate they be mandated by promoting the diffusion and expansion into expected practice
- Develop guidelines for a comprehensive quality early literacy learning (the composite of practices in the classroom, community, and home)
- Establish criteria and guidelines for intensive summer reading programs (must be a priority)
- As effective practices are implemented, disseminate information to support the effective implementation of Response to Intervention to the benefit of all students in universal, targeted, and intensive instruction
- Collaborate with others who provide professional learning for teachers, principals, and literacy coaches to increase their knowledge and skills to implement effective literacy programs
- Identify experts and capitalize on their expertise to support the work of the Center

- Develop a single online source of information dissemination for Iowa educators. It should include:
  - Summaries of effective practices
  - Periodic reports for teachers
  - Resources from other states
- Collaborate with teacher preparation programs regarding teaching literacy and the transition from preparation to practice
- Examine statewide data on factors impacting literacy (such as absenteeism, socio-economic status, and other variables) and collaborate with AEAs and local schools to address issues identified

Budget: Remaining appropriation after funding has been provided for Director, support personnel, site expenses, and needs assessment.

## **Conclusion**

The Iowa Reading Research Center Committee respectfully submits these recommendations for consideration.

The process began with legislation that must be viewed as a catalyst – a launching pad for our growth and innovation. It should serve as a clarion call.

We must clearly understand our current practices and develop systems to increase reading achievement across the state. This will require collaboration across multiple stakeholders to increase scientifically based practices in Iowa classrooms and community programs.

Across the entire Committee, there is a keen sense of high hope and expectation. The opportunity for measurable change can impact generations, we believe. The task ahead for Iowa educators – and for our entire community – is daunting, but the IRRRC, and this process, has immeasurable potential for a profound impact on the lives of our children and the future of our state.