

Legislative Report

Iowa Reading Research Center 2024

IOWA | Department of Education



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Introduction

Legislative Authority

The legislative priorities of the Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) are written into Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c) and Iowa Administrative Code rule 281–79.9(256).

Section 256.9(49)(c) Subject to an appropriation of funds by the general assembly, the IRRC shall collaborate with area education agencies on implementing the provisions of this paragraph (c)

- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)** Apply current research on literacy to provide for the development and dissemination of the following:
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(a)** Instructional strategies for prekindergarten through grade twelve to achieve literacy proficiency that includes reading, reading comprehension, and writing for all students.
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(b)** Strategies for identifying and providing evidence-based interventions for students, beginning in kindergarten, who are at risk of not achieving literacy proficiency
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(c)** Models for effective school and community partnerships to improve student literacy
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(d)** Reading assessments
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(e)** Professional development strategies and materials to support teacher effectiveness in student literacy development. Subject to an appropriation of funds by the general assembly, the center shall collaborate and coordinate with the area education agencies and the department to develop and offer to school districts at no cost professional development services to enhance the skills of elementary teachers in the use of evidence-based strategies to improve the literacy skills of all students
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(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
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(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 pursuant to section 256.7, subsection 31
- **Section 256.9(49)(c)(2)** The first efforts of the center shall focus on kindergarten through grade three. The center shall draw upon national and state expertise in the field of literacy proficiency, including experts from Iowa's institutions of higher education and area education agencies with backgrounds in literacy development. The center shall seek support from the Iowa research community in data report development and analysis of available information from Iowa education data sources. The center shall work with the department to identify additional needs for tools and technical assistance for Iowa schools to help schools achieve literacy proficiency goals and seek public and private partnerships in developing and accessing necessary tools and technical assistance

- **Section 256.9(49)(c)** Approval of any institution’s application (i.e., an Iowa college for teacher preparation) for adding the dyslexia specialist endorsement must include approval by the Iowa Reading Research Center

The University of Iowa

The University of Iowa (UI) hosts the IRRC as one of the nation’s top public research universities, thus providing an academic base for the center director as well as resources to support its continued growth. UI is the fiscal agent and provides office space for the IRRC’s staff.

Communication Methods

The IRRC disseminates research findings and research-based resources through various ways to maximize impact and reach a broad audience. Communication methods include the [IRRC website](#) and [IRRC blog](#); IRRC social media accounts ([X](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)); traditional (e.g., print newspapers and radio interviews) and new (e.g., podcasts and online videos) media; monthly IRRC email newsletters; hosting the Iowa Science of Reading Summit and in-person presentations at schools, area education agencies (AEAs) and conferences.

Reading Research Stakeholders

The IRRC conducts research in support of literacy education efforts across Iowa. Activities address the needs and concerns of the major stakeholders in the state, including:

- K-12 students
- Families
- Educators
- Local education agencies
- Nonpublic schools
- AEAs
- Iowa’s institutes of higher education, private and public
- Community organizations
- Iowa Department of Education (Department)
- Professional organizations

In addition, the IRRC Advisory Council meets three times per year, as required. The Department director or the director’s designee appoints the council members, and members serve four-year terms.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the IRRC Advisory Council met on Oct. 25, 2023, Nov. 30, 2023 and April 22, 2024. The council’s members represent a cross-section of organizations and institutions supporting reading practices in the state and are listed in the following table.

IRRC FY24 Members and Organizations

Organization Type	Name	Organization
Professional Organization	Beth Ades-Hanson	Iowa State Education Association
Institutes of Higher Education	Sherry Petty	University of Northern Iowa
Department of Education	McKenzie Snow	Iowa Department of Education
Department of Education	Kim Buryanek	Iowa Department of Education
AEA	John Speer	Grant Wood AEA
School District	Beth Happe	Martensdale-St. Marys Community School District
Accredited Nonpublic School	Kathleen Konrardy	Holy Family Catholic Schools
School District	Erick Pruitt	Ankeny Community School District
School District	Stacey Cole	Storm Lake Community School District
Community-Based Nonprofit	Mindy VanZuiden	Decoding Dyslexia Iowa
Parent	Cori Stanley	Indianola Community School District

IRRC Implementation of Reading Practices

The IRRC conducts the following types of applied research in collaboration with stakeholders:

- Research to guide the development of practices and products (e.g., intervention procedures and assessments)
- Research to inform the effective implementation of literacy policy and practice
- Research to evaluate the impact of literacy policy and practice

The IRRC works in partnership with the Department, and legislative action and IRRC Advisory Council recommendations guide its priorities. The following table provides a description of FY24 activities of the IRRC listed by Iowa Administrative Code citations.

IRRC FY 2024 Activities Listed by Iowa Administrative Code Citations

Iowa Code Citations	IRRC Activities
<p>Evidence-Based Interventions and Strategies</p> <p>Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(b).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Launched new eLearning modules focused on tools for teachers to implement strong reading instruction in their classroom: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher Tools for Universally Implementing Structured Literacy Content ● FastBridge in Iowa Schools: Assessment and Data-Based Decision Making ● Published 21 blog posts on reading instruction. Notable posts include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Strategies for Effective Tier 1 Grouping and Differentiation” ● “Accommodating Notetaking” ● “Rethinking How We Teach Literacy in Tier 1: Targeted, Small-Group Instruction”

Iowa Code Citations	IRRC Activities
<p>School and Community Partnerships</p> <p>Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(c)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provided technical assistance to schools on core literacy practices and curricula. Example topics included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Executing a district-wide curriculum review ● Evaluating and selecting new reading instructional materials ● Fidelity monitoring for implementing reading instructional materials ● Aligning multiple reading programs across grade levels and multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) tiers ● Developed a new caregiver resource hub that includes resources and eLearning content specifically for parents and caregivers. Modules include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Core Literacy Skills ● The Science of Reading ● Advocating for Your Student ● Assistive Technology ● Understanding the FastBridge Screener ● Structured Literacy ● Continued providing free consultation and support to Iowa families with questions about reading literacy, resources, dyslexia and other reading disabilities. Families were able to meet with staff virtually or in-person for assistive technology consultations. ● Attended, presented and/or exhibited at conferences, including the Iowa Science of Reading Summit, Decoding Dyslexia Iowa Conference, School Administrators of Iowa Conference, Iowa Science of Reading School Leadership Summit, Iowa Association of School Boards, Iowa Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, the IRRC's Change Academy for Decision Makers and Iowa Reading Association Conference. ● Presented to AEAs. Events included the Great Prairie AEA Dyslexia Workshop, No-Limits Conference sponsored by Prairie Lakes AEA and Engage2Learn Symposium at Grant Wood AEA.

Iowa Code Citations	IRRC Activities
<p>Reading Assessments</p> <p>Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(d)</p> <p>Iowa Code section 279.68 1(a)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed training materials for teachers that recommend additional diagnostics and instructional strategies based on a student’s FastBridge screening scores. • Continued to teach EDTL:6171 Advanced Reading Clinic Techniques in the Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement Program, which focuses on standardized assessments for diagnosing reading disorders.
<p>Data Reports</p> <p>Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(f)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated district partnership guidelines, no-cost service agreements for continued professional development and data analysis services. • Continued a three-year partnership with Ankeny Community School District to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured literacy training program and curriculum change, including providing financial support for LETRS training for school staff, collecting baseline student test data and creating and launching teacher surveys on confidence, efficacy and qualifications.
<p>Intensive Summer Reading Program</p> <p>Iowa Code section 279.68 4(c)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified and evaluated technology options for summer literacy initiative for the Department. • Collaborated on Notice of Award for Summer Camp Grant awardees, specifically evidence-based literacy practices.

Iowa Code Citations	IRRC Activities
<p>Professional Development</p> <p>Iowa Code section 256.9(49)(c)(1)(e)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offered the first Iowa Science of Reading Summit for 350 Iowa educators to learn about the science of reading, structured literacy and evidence-based reading instruction. ● Offered workshops focused on dyslexia and reading instruction for pre-service teachers at UI and remote attendees across the state. ● Offered professional development, classroom observations and consultation to in-state teachers and administrators focused on establishing new reading curricula, aligning reading curriculum across tiers of MTSS, measuring implementation fidelity of reading curricula and implementing structured literacy in the classroom. ● Updated and expanded eLearning options. ● Developed and hosted a one-day Leading Literacy Change Academy for 90 district decision-makers interested in best practices for implementing large-scale literacy changes. ● Increased online engagement through content on social media channels, reaching an average of 1,227 accounts every week across IRRC social media platforms. ● Sent a monthly IRRC newsletter to 6,818 recipients, including librarians, school principals, teachers, AEA staff, higher education faculty and staff and school district personnel. ● Launched "Speaking of Literacy" podcast, highlighting the role of speech-language pathology in reading and writing development.
<p>Dyslexia</p> <p>Senate File 2319, Chapter 1077</p> <p>Senate File 2356</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approved Grand View University as an Institute of Higher Education in the state of Iowa to offer the Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement program. ● Provided required Dyslexia Overview eLearning module to over 20,000 pre-service and in-service educators in Iowa. ● Developed and presented an undergraduate certificate track on dyslexia for Teacher Education Program students at UI. ● Participated in the Iowa Dyslexia Board, per Iowa Code section 256.32A. ● Partnered with the Department and Sterling Literacy Consulting to provide guidance on the creation of a state-wide dyslexia handbook. ● Taught Dyslexia Specialist Endorsement courses through the University of Iowa.

Proposed and Projected Activities

At the start of FY25, the IRRRC welcomed a new full-time director, Dr. Shawn Datchuk. He has extensive experience in both practice and research. He previously served as a K-12 special educator, elementary educator and district administrator. Dr. Datchuk most recently served as an associate professor of special education at the UI College of Education, where he will continue to serve on faculty. He has over 30 peer-reviewed publications and serves on eight editorial boards of academic research journals. He works with IRRRC staff and the Department on translating up-to-date research findings into improved literacy practice.

Under the leadership of Dr. Datchuk the IRRRC will continue to strengthen two of its cornerstones in FY25: *dissemination* of research findings and *technical assistance* to educators and caregivers. Continuing its focus to disseminate the most up-to-date literacy research, the IRRRC will host the third annual Iowa Science of Reading Summit in July 2025. An estimated 750 educators from across the state will participate in two days of professional development presentations, workshops and discussions. As an example of technical assistance, 15 districts across Iowa have recently become IRRRC Data Partners—a formal, no-cost partnership between IRRRC staff who provide in-person and remote assistance on implementing evidence-based literacy practices and district educators who share student literacy data for ongoing analysis and evaluation.

The start of FY25 has also presented an opportunity to renew the third IRRRC cornerstone of *research*. For the past several years, the IRRRC has not engaged in ongoing research. However, a renewed focus on research is essential to the mission of the center, its legislative priorities and the overall strength and quality of dissemination and technical assistance work. Based on ongoing conversation with stakeholders, the IRRRC is currently researching and developing multiple projects for FY25. One of these projects—spurred by new academic standards that emphasize cursive handwriting for elementary students—includes researching evidence-based techniques to teach cursive handwriting and developing free curricula and online tools. Another example stems from ongoing queries from caregivers about interpreting school test scores. The IRRRC is researching caregiver knowledge of assessment data to create guides that will help them interpret scores and collaborate with schools.

With three cornerstones—*technical assistance*, *dissemination* and *research*—the IRRRC is collaborating with stakeholders (e.g., educators, administrators, caregivers and policymakers) on translating up-to-date research findings into actionable solutions. As an example of translating research into action, the IRRRC launched a free online suite (i.e., Literacy LIFTER) at the start of FY25 on evidence-based techniques to teach handwriting and early reading skills. Since its launch, it has accrued over 30,000-page views and 13,000 file downloads.

Summary

The IRRC is poised to develop services and products valuable to Iowans for the coming fiscal year. Educators, caregivers and administrators from across the state frequently contact the IRRC with questions and requests for assistance. This continued outreach shows that the IRRC has a strong reputation for trusted, straightforward advice and collaboration. As the state of Iowa takes important strides on ensuring high-quality literacy instruction for all students, the IRRC can provide up-to-date dissemination, technical assistance and research that provides actionable guidance in support and implementation of literacy instruction.