

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 20, 2013

Contact:

Michelle Hosp, PhD., Director  
Iowa Reading Research Center  
319-399-6730  
mhosp@gwaea.org

Nancy Garberson  
for the Iowa Reading Research Center  
(319) 329-7660  
nancy@mcshome.com

### **Survey: Lack of Consistency in Literacy Education**

*The Iowa Reading Research Center will coordinate best practices in Iowa schools*

Cedar Rapids, Iowa –A survey commissioned by the Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) and conducted by Iowa’s regent universities shows inconsistencies in literacy instructional practices in Iowa schools, which may be contributing to stagnant reading trends reported among Iowa’s students for the past several years.

The IRRC, which was created through state legislation in 2012, contracted with Iowa State University, the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa to survey Iowa teachers and school administrators in an effort to better understand the current state of reading instructional practices that may be contributing to stagnant student scores. “While improvements in Iowa have begun and are good news, there is still a lot we can do to support teachers and ensure best practices are being implemented in our schools so that all students can be successful in reading,” said Michelle Hosp, Director of the IRRC. “These survey results clearly demonstrate a lack of consistency across our school systems in our understanding and implementation of approaches to teaching literacy.”

The IRRC survey’s focus was on educators – teachers and administrators – and their own professional and practical classroom experience, including teacher knowledge of the curriculum, instructional practice, and content knowledge about reading instruction.

The survey revealed inconsistencies in the following areas among Iowa’s schools:

**Classroom Literacy Instruction** For example, there is a wide array of teaching approaches, uneven interventions for students who are struggling and disparate time allotments for literacy instruction.

page 1

**Professional Development** A majority of educators reported professional development participation related to the Iowa Core English Language Arts, but with a varying range of time allotted for implementation, and a low percentage of professional development focus in reading interventions for targeted students.

**Resources** The survey results indicate an uneven perception of the availability of resources, including technology resources and materials covering the Iowa Core standards, but results also showed some agreement among administrators and teachers that the time available to dedicate toward Iowa Core standards is insufficient.

**Summer Reading Programs** Just more than half of Iowa's schools responding to the survey indicate they currently offer a summer reading program. Among those school programs, both the duration and the daily time allotment for literacy instruction vary widely.

Nearly one in four of Iowa's public third-grade students (8,706) is not proficient in reading. National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading results for Iowa students has been virtually stagnant since 1992\* among both 4th and 8th grade students tested. At the same time, other states, including Alabama, Florida and Maryland, are showing higher rates of improvement than Iowa in NAEP scores for literacy.

The IRRC is tasked with:

- the identification of teaching strategies and interventions;
- student assessments;
- professional development for educators;
- a statewide student data reporting system; and
- summer literacy program with the goal of literacy proficiency for all of Iowa's students.

Hosp said the IRRC is in a unique position to advocate and coordinate best practices because the center is not committed to any one entity. "Our mission is to mine the existing research and disseminate proven interventions and strategies. Our goal is to be the cohesive, comprehensive resource for vetted, evidence-based practices so that teachers and parents do not have to spend their valuable time trying to identify best practices. We can instead do that for them."

To that end, the IRRC website is also a growing content source of highly vetted, evidence-based resources for teachers, parents and all stakeholders interested in advancing students' literacy and reading proficiency.

Department of Education Director Brad Buck said the IRRC's work will help drive improvement in Iowa schools. "There are many success stories every day in our schools, but we clearly have work to do to make sure all students are proficient readers," Buck said. "This is critical because reading is a gateway skill to learning, and we are committed as a state to preparing all students for success in college and career training."

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Everyone agrees on the importance of reading as a gateway skill to learning, but nearly one in four Iowa third-graders is not proficient in reading. To address this issue, The Iowa Reading Research Center (IRRC) commissioned Iowa State University, the University of Northern Iowa, and the University of Iowa to collect data and provide a report in an effort to better understand the needs for literacy instruction in Iowa. The information will be used to guide the IRRC in its work providing evidence-based literacy practices for educators in Iowa. Below are the highlights from the report. The full report is available on the IRRC website: [www.iowareadingresearch.org](http://www.iowareadingresearch.org)

The IRRC is currently supporting a new early warning system consisting of a statewide database and assessments to help schools determine which students are at risk for reading failure. The next step is improving the instruction students receive. This report clearly demonstrates a lack of consistency across our school systems in our understanding and implementation of approaches to teaching literacy. We must do better for the students in Iowa, and the IRRC is dedicated to identifying and supporting evidence-based practices so that every student will be a proficient reader by the end of third grade.

Key findings from the report include:

- (1) **Classroom Literacy Instruction**
  - a. A wide variety of approaches are used to teach reading at the universal, targeted and intensive levels;
  - b. A majority of schools allot 61-90 minutes for literacy instruction each day;
  - c. Teacher and principal knowledge regarding the design of reading interventions in their schools varies widely between districts and within districts.
- (2) **Professional Activities of Principals and Teachers**
  - a. Most principals and teachers report that they participate in collaborative data analysis and a majority report they have an allotted time to do so;
  - b. A majority of teachers have participated in professional development related to the Iowa Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards within the past year;
  - c. Although most teachers report feeling at least somewhat prepared to teach the Iowa Core ELA standards, they feel least prepared to do so with English Language Learners.
- (3) **Resources**
  - a. More principals than teachers perceive that teachers have sufficient access to technology resources;
  - b. More principals than teachers believe that teachers have sufficient materials and resources for teaching the Iowa Core standards;
  - c. More principals than teachers perceive that teachers have enough time to implement the Iowa Core standards. However, a majority of AEA staff do not believe that teachers have sufficient time to implement the standards.
- (4) **Area Education Agency Support**
  - a. Approximately half of AEA staff reported providing professional development (PD) on the Iowa Core at least monthly;
  - b. PD is provided predominantly in larger groups, with the remainder evenly divided between being presented in small groups or individually;

- c. Overall, 30 percent of teachers reported receiving PD from AEA staff on reading intervention at the targeted or intensive levels.
- (5) **Summer Programs**
- a. Approximately 54 percent of schools currently have a summer reading program available for students demonstrating deficits in the area of literacy;
  - b. Most summer literacy programs last between two and four weeks, with literacy instruction taking place for one hour or less each day of the program.
- (6) **Reading Endorsement and Degrees**
- a. Approximately 30 percent of PK-3 teachers surveyed have reading endorsements and 8 percent have reading specialist degrees;
  - b. Approximately 9 percent of principals have reading endorsements and 2 percent have reading specialist degrees;
  - c. Approximately 11 percent of AEA staff have reading endorsements and 11 percent have reading specialist degrees.

### **Data Collection**

Administrators, instructional coaches, teachers, and AEA staff were asked to respond to an online survey regarding the topics of interest. From those respondents, administrators and teachers from districts within each AEA, as well as administrators and teachers from each of Iowa's urban districts, were selected for follow-up interviews.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Universal instruction***- characterized as the primary literacy instruction provided to every student and directly aligned with the Iowa Core. These are the state-adopted standards that outline what educators are expected to teach and students are expected to learn.

***Targeted instruction***- characterized by an increased focus of instruction or support. Students in targeted level will receive universal instruction, as well as small group, targeted, evidence-based instruction.

***Intensive instruction***- characterized by an additional increase in the focus of instruction or support. Students in the intensive level typically will receive universal instruction, as well as individualized intensive evidence-based instruction.