



School Improvement Booster

An e-newsletter provided by
Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

December 2013: Reading

Legislation and Rules

Significant education reform legislation passed the Iowa Legislature in the 2012 session. The Education Reform Act created [Iowa Code Section 279.68](#) which included several provisions for reading in Iowa schools, including these and others:

- Established a task force charged with recommending state-wide assessment aligned to the Iowa Core (including reading and math at grades 4, 8, and 11 and for science in grades 8 and 11)
- Provided for third grade retention for students starting with those who are currently in kindergarten if they aren't reading on grade level at the end of third grade and don't attend a summer school program (or meet any of several other exceptions)
- Mandated summer school starting in the summer of 2017 (once again starting with the current kindergarten class) for those students not reading on grade level unless the district receives a waiver from the DE
- Established a requirement that students in grades K-3 have 90 minutes daily of research based core reading instruction.
- Mandated a reading enhancement and acceleration development initiative in each district in addition to the 90 minutes referenced above, designed to offer intensive accelerated reading instruction to each K-3 student who is assessed as exhibiting a substantial deficiency in reading
- Directed districts to report to the community the results of the strategies used in the district and community to improve reading performance when more than 15% of students at an attendance center aren't proficient in reading

The legislation included a trigger, that implementation would only follow funding. The 2013 Legislative Session provided funding of \$8 million to support moving forward. In addition to the requirements established by the Legislature, the State Board of Education has now authored rules for implementation, which have been officially noticed ([see the proposed rules](#) here beginning on page 1381) to implement [Iowa Code 279.68](#).

Public Hearing

A public hearing is scheduled on January 3, 2014 at the Grimes State Office Building from 2- 3 PM. Interested individuals may present oral comments at the public hearing or make written comments on the proposed amendments on or before Jan. 3, at 4:30 PM. Comments on the proposed amendments should be directed to:

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Discussion about Reading

In reading, like in every discipline of education, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are all three critical to ensure all students learn to read and later use reading for pleasure and for learning as they grow into adulthood. Curriculum is what we teach. Instruction is how we teach the curriculum. Assessment is how we know whether students have learned what we taught. Reading is a core skill for life in and out of school. This quick review of research and information related to reading will help you prepare for the implementation of this new legislation beginning in the fall of 2014.

Curriculum

In the literacy curriculum arena, Iowa has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and seven standards unique to Iowa. Together they are called the [Iowa Core Curriculum](#) in literacy. The CCSS were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, emerging from work done previously over the last decades in individual states. Once the decision was made to adopt the CCSS, Iowa brought in reading experts from across the state and they recommended the additional seven standards. [The state board approved those standards in 2008 with a phase-in schedule for implementation locally by the 2014-15 school year.](#) Literacy standards include reading, which will be the focus of this newsletter, but also writing, speaking, and listening. The Iowa Core Curriculum lays out a detailed progression of learning for every Iowa student that includes not only a focus on English language arts, but also literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects.

The standards include a variety of resources, among them a vision for what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. “Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language.”

Common Core Summary: [here](#) is a link to a summarized history of the Model Core, Iowa Core, Common Core state standards and Iowa’s progression on development and implementation. It’s written by Legislative Services Agency (nonpartisan) budget staff in November 2013, so nice to have on hand for posterity or just to share with inquiring minds.

Instruction

Over the last decade, “research based practices” or “evidence-based practices” are terms that have been used to describe a multitude of educational work. Sometimes these terms are used appropriately and sometimes not. IES is a non-partisan agency within the federal government that can help school leaders find the true meaning and application of these terms. The IES mission is this: “Our mission is to provide rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and share this information broadly. By identifying what works, what doesn’t, and why, we aim to improve educational outcomes for all students, particularly those at risk of failure. We are the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, and by law our activities must be free of partisan political influence.” IES publishes practice guides, which bring the “best available evidence and expertise to bear on current challenges in education. Authors of practice guides combine their expertise with the findings of rigorous research, when available, to develop specific recommendations for addressing these challenges. The What Works Clearing House develops Practice Guides that highlight instructional practices that work.” Several have been written for reading.

The Practice Guides make recommendations and each recommendation is offered with a level of evidence attached.

“A rating of strong evidence refers to consistent evidence that the recommended strategies, programs, or practices improve student outcomes for a wide population of students. In other words, there is strong causal and generalizable evidence.

“A rating of moderate evidence refers either to evidence from studies that allow strong causal conclusions but cannot be generalized with assurance to the population on which a recommendation is focused (perhaps because the findings have not been widely replicated) or to evidence from studies that are generalizable but have some causal ambiguity. It also might be that the studies that exist do not specifically examine the outcomes of interest in the practice guide although they may be related.

“A rating of minimal evidence suggests that the panel cannot point to a body of research that demonstrates the practice’s positive effect on student achievement. In some cases, this simply means that the recommended practices would be difficult to study in a rigorous, experimental fashion; in other cases, it means that researchers have not yet studied this practice, or that there is weak or conflicting evidence of effectiveness. A minimal evidence rating does not indicate that the recommendation is any less important than other recommendations with a strong evidence or moderate evidence rating.

Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade is an IES Practice Guide written in 2010 by reading experts Tim Shanahan, Kim Kallison, Christine Carriere, Nell Duke, David Pearson, Christopher SchatSchneider, and Joseph Torgesen. It offers five recommendations and levels of evidence for each. Many of these recommendations were supported and carried out in Iowa through work with Emily Calhoun and the Every Child Reads Initiative, with the work of Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey and their Gradual Release Model, through Second Chance Reading and other state or AEA lead instructional initiatives.

Recommendation 1. (Strong Evidence)

Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies.

- Teach students how to use several research-based reading comprehension strategies.
- Teach reading comprehension strategies individually or in combination.
- Teach reading comprehension strategies by using a gradual release of responsibility.

Recommendation 2. (Moderate Evidence)

Teach students to identify and use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content.

- Explain how to identify and connect the parts of narrative texts.
- Provide instruction on common structures of informational texts.

Recommendation 3. (Minimal Evidence)

Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text.

- Structure the discussion to complement the text, the instructional purpose, and the readers’ ability and grade level.
- Develop discussion questions that require students to think deeply about text.
- Ask follow-up questions to encourage and facilitate discussion.
- Have students lead structured small-group discussions.

Recommendation 4. (Minimal Evidence)

Select texts purposefully to support comprehension development.

- Teach reading comprehension with multiple genres of text.
- Choose texts of high quality with richness and depth of ideas and information.
- Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for the students’ reading ability and the instructional activity.
- Use texts that support the purpose of instruction.

Recommendation 5. (Moderate Evidence)

Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension.

- Help students discover the purpose and benefits of reading.
- Create opportunities for students to see themselves as successful readers.
- Give students reading choices.
- Give students the opportunity to learn by collaborating with their peers

Another practice guide pertinent to this discussion in reading is one entitled *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades* published in 2009. Dave Tilly of the Iowa Department of Education was one of the authors of this IES Practice Guide, as well as Russell Gersten, Donald Compton, Carol M. Connor, Joseph Dimino, Lana Santoro, and Sylvia Linan-Thompson. Recommendations from this report follow:

Recommendation 1 Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. Regularly monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities. (Moderate Evidence)

Recommendation 2. Provide differentiated reading instruction for all students based on assessments of students' current reading levels. (Low Evidence)

Recommendation 3. Provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark on universal screening. Typically these groups meet between three and five times a week for 20–40 minutes. (Strong Evidence)

Recommendation 4. Monitor the progress of tier 2 students at least once a month. Use these data to determine whether students still require intervention. For those still making insufficient progress, school-wide teams should design a tier 3 intervention plan. (Low Evidence)

Recommendation 5. Provide intensive instruction daily that promotes the development of various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in tier 2 small group instruction (tier 3). (Low Evidence)

Other Practice Guides available in reading include these:

- [Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades](#) (Dec. 2007)
- [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#) (Aug. 2008)

While using the IES Practice Guides to find evidence based practices, there are other ways to do so as well.

1. Go to the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), also published by IES, and find reports on individual programs, practices, products, and policies.
2. Ask experts with broad reading knowledge – at least three – what authors/studies they would recommend to find instructional practices that work. While it's good to ask local, regional and state people what they would recommend, it's also okay to email the famous reading experts like Nell Duke at Michigan State, David Pearson at UC Berkeley, Tim Shanahan at the University of Illinois, Chicago, or Emily Calhoun at the Phoenix Alliance about what they would recommend, particularly for the reading skills specific to what you know your students need . Read the recommendations as a study team. See how they compare with other research you've read. Then decide what you're going to do and find an expert to help with the PD and implementation.

Professional Development

Once you decide what evidence-based instruction you're going to focus on to raise reading achievement, professional development in the strategy or model chosen is necessary to be sure all educators can implement the new instruction into classroom practice with fidelity. Hiring a professional developer who has implemented the strategy or model in a classroom setting to develop expertise and using the [Iowa Professional Development Model](#) for the training regimen will ensure a robust implementation that should result in the expected gain supported in the research.

Assessment

Assessment is critical in the delivery of any curriculum program, including reading. Summative results from the state test, currently the Iowa Assessments, provide program evaluation data and answers questions like these: Is the current reading instruction in our district working for our students? What groups of students performed well? What groups of students didn't? If we try an innovation district wide like 90 minutes of reading daily for all K-6 students, will it have an overall impact on how well students read? Benchmark assessments also provide this kind of data, but more frequently than the annual test. Additionally, standards-based benchmarks can provide information about where there are breakdowns in performance on the standards.

Districts must have formative assessments on which instruction can be built. In the past many districts have used individually administered reading inventories like the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) or the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). These provided very helpful information as teachers listened to students read and were able to identify miscues, get fluency scores, determine areas of student performance in need of growth, and other information. Those assessments can still provide districts with important and useful information, particularly for the struggling readers.

Teachers gather all sorts of data during the routine of the school day, which continues to be critically important. They listen to students read and observe how they use the information they gather during reading. They listen to students talk about the text they've been reading and they read what students write in response to what they've read. This "up close" data can be responded to immediately with instruction to meet students' individual needs. Jose, LaToya, and Jon struggled with word families in the lesson today, so small group instruction can be provided to them in that area almost immediately. Margaret, LaTisha, and Jenny weren't very fluent when they were reading to the volunteer today, so they can do some readers theater tomorrow. [School improvement literature on formative assessment](#) consistently demonstrates that this immediate response to children's needs increases student learning.

Whatever assessments you determine best meet the needs of your district, it's important to remember that they are valuable only if you respond to them with program changes and instruction based on what the assessments indicate is needed. If your assessments tell you that reading comprehension is problematic, yet you provide no instruction to help students better understand what they read, the assessments will have served no purpose beyond evaluation.

RTI

Iowa schools are currently implementing the educational initiative Response to Intervention. Components include the following:

- Evidence-Based Curriculum and Instruction shall be provided at the Universal level
- Universal Screening shall be used three times per year
- Evidence-based, instructional interventions at the Targeted and Intensive levels shall be provided to each student who needs them
- Progress Monitoring Data shall be collected and used to guide instruction
- Data-Based Decision Making

FAST

The Iowa Department of Education has adopted the [Formative Assessment System for Teachers](#) (FAST) from the University of Minnesota as the universal screening and progress monitoring assessment for Response to Intervention which school districts may use. FAST describes the tools this way, “The Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) is a suite of assessment tools designed to make assessment highly efficient and instructionally relevant. Assessments are designed for screening, progress monitoring, and program evaluation. It is our goal to use technology to automate the scoring, data entry, analysis, and reporting - so teachers spend less time engaged in assessment and more time engaged with instruction.” FAST has been provided to 10% of Iowa schools for reading assessment in grades K-6 at no cost this year, and was originally intended to expand to another 10% of schools next year, and so on until all schools have access to it. Now that the early reading intervention plan has been funded by the state, that implementation timeline will be accelerated, potentially available to all districts by August 2014. Dave Tilly of the Iowa Department of Education described the FAST system in [this document](#) prepared for Iowa ASCD.

Iowa Reading Research Center

Iowa established a Reading Research Center as a result of legislation passed in the 2012 session. “[Iowa Reading Research Center](#) is an online collection of literacy resources available to the public for classroom learning and teaching, at-home support, and educator research for children birth through 12th grade. Resources collected have undergone varying levels of screening to ensure research is accurate and relevant to visitors.” We hope to learn more about the supports the Iowa Reading Research Center will offer to school leaders in the coming months.

Quotes

“If learning to read effectively is a journey toward ever-increasing ability to comprehend texts, then teachers are the tour guides, ensuring that students stay on course, pausing to make sure they appreciate the landscape of understanding, and encouraging the occasional diversion down an inviting and interesting cul-de-sac or byway.”

Nell K. Duke, P. David Pearson, Stephanie L. Strachan, and Alison K. Billman

“Literacy is inseparable from opportunity, and opportunity is inseparable from freedom.

The freedom promised by literacy is both freedom from – from ignorance, oppression, poverty – and freedom to – to do new things, to make choices, to learn.”

Koichiro Matsuura

“A teacher’s job is always to bridge from the known to the new. Because there really is no other choice. Kids are who they are. They know what they know. They bring what they bring. Our job is not to wish that students knew more or knew differently. Our job is to turn each student’s knowledge, along with the diversity of knowledge we will encounter in a classroom of learners, into a curricular strength rather than an instructional inconvenience.”

P. David Pearson, 1997

***If you have any questions about the School Improvement Booster or suggested future topics,
please contact Susie Olesen at susie.olesen@isfis.net.***
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