



A Study of the Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework

**Amy Griswold and Michael Bunch
Measurement Incorporated**

7/11/2014

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| 1. About the IRLA | 5 |
| 2. Technical Documentation Related to Psychometric Properties | 7 |
| <i>A. Estimates of reliability</i> | 7 |
| <i>B. Evidence that the IRLA has items of varied difficulty</i> | 7 |
| <i>C. Estimates of error in measurement</i> | 7 |
| <i>D. Validity evidence: construct and criterion-related validity</i> | 7 |
| <i>E. Validity evidence: sensitivity to growth</i> | 8 |
| <i>F. Validity evidence: content validity</i> | 10 |
| <i>G. Evidence that the IRLA does not exhibit bias toward any major subgroups</i> | 12 |
| 3. Alignment to the Common Core State Standards and Support for Teaching the Common Core | 12 |
| <i>A. Evidence of alignment to the Common Core State Standards</i> | 12 |
| <i>B. Evidence that the IRLA helps teachers get to know the Common Core</i> | 14 |
| <i>C. Evidence that the IRLA helps teachers improve their instruction by moving them to the 3 Shifts in the Common Core</i> | 15 |
| Educational effectiveness | 16 |
| <i>A. Providing diagnostic information</i> | 17 |
| <i>B. Tracking student progress in real time.</i> | 19 |
| <i>C. Helping teachers learn to teach reading</i> | 19 |
| <i>D. Helping teachers get to know their students</i> | 20 |
| <i>E. Providing a low-stakes accountability system for schools or districts.</i> | 22 |
| <i>F. Organizing written materials</i> | 22 |
| Conclusions | 23 |
| References | 25 |
| Appendix 1: MI content/bias/alignment reviewer comments | 26 |
| Appendix 2: Expert review by Dr. Kristen Conradi | 27 |
| Appendix 3: Alignment survey instrument | 30 |
| Appendix 4: User Experience survey instrument | 33 |
| Appendix 5: User Experience survey results | 34 |
| Appendix 6: Case Studies | 40 |
| Appendix 7: Student-identified reading goals | 42 |

Introduction

In September 2013, Measurement Incorporated (MI) was contracted by the American Reading Company (ARC) to conduct a research study of the Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework (IRLA), a product of ARC. Founded in 1980, Measurement Incorporated provides educational and professional examinations, program evaluation, and related services to state and local governments, other testing companies, and various professional organizations. Their list of satisfied customers includes over 32 state and local departments of education and more than 15 corporate clients and partners.

MI has been a leader in the development of authentic assessment instruments since before the name was applied. Ranging from selected response to technology-enhanced items, MI has been able to successfully partner with clients through significant shifts in the educational and assessment fields. In addition, MI conducts statistical research and analysis on an ongoing basis and works to ensure that assessment materials—whether individual items, entire tests, or batteries of tests—are both psychometrically sound and legally defensible.

MI's study of the IRLA was designed to establish the IRLA's psychometric integrity and its effectiveness as a framework for reading level assessment to support reading instruction. MI's study of the IRLA was composed of two phases. Phase 1, psychometric integrity, included evaluation of alignment to the Common Core State Standards, review for bias and grade-level appropriateness, establishment of a clear theory of action, and measures of reliability and validity as a tool for assessment, including student data analysis and expert review of the IRLA. Phase 2, educational effectiveness, included quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the

experience of using the IRLA by teachers, reading specialists, and school administrators.

Activities in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 were conducted concurrently between September 2013 and May 2014.

The study focused on ten key questions about the IRLA:

Psychometric integrity

- Can the IRLA be used to find a valid and reliable baseline (independent) reading level, PK-12?

Alignment to the Common Core

- Is the IRLA built on the Common Core Standards for Reading?
- Does the IRLA help teachers get to know the Common Core?
- Does the IRLA help teachers improve their instruction by moving them to the 3 Shifts in the Common Core?

Educational Effectiveness

- Does the IRLA provide diagnostic information on each student that is useful to students, parents, teachers and administrators?
- Does the IRLA help teachers track student progress in real time?
- Does the IRLA help teachers learn to teach reading?
- Does the IRLA help teachers get to know their students?
- Does the IRLA provide a low-stakes accountability system for schools or districts?
- Does the IRLA help organize written materials, ensuring all students (at every reading level) have enough things they can read and understand on their own and therefore enough opportunity for sufficient independent reading practice?

This final report presents background information about the IRLA, an assessment of the IRLA's psychometric integrity, and assessment of its alignment to the Common Core State Standards and overall educational effectiveness for teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

1. About the IRLA

The IRLA is a formative assessment framework that supports students, teachers, parents, and administrators as they make the Common Core the academic road map for their everyday work. The IRLA maps the reading process from a pre-reading stage to college and career readiness. As each student works, in a variety of meaningful contexts, the IRLA helps teachers use the lens of the Common Core to give immediate, appropriate, and targeted feedback to each student, and to determine and suggest the next learning goal and learning actions which should provide a clear direction for that student's literacy education.

The IRLA can be used either to support existing reading instruction or to provide an action planning framework for large scale school reform. Web-based eIRLA dashboards allow administrators to track the average rate of reading growth, in real time, in each classroom and school in order to establish and monitor useful systems for teacher and administrator learning.

In terms of content-related evidence, the IRLA maps out the stages of the reading process, expected at each grade level, K-12, using the architecture provided by the Common Core Standards. The IRLA is divided into 13 reading levels, PK-12. Each reading level is defined by the unique skills/strategies (standards) a reader must control in order to successfully handle text at that level. This is quite different than leveling systems which use the average number of words in a sentence, an average frequency score for vocabulary, or a continuous gradient of text difficulty. The IRLA levels are built on the Common Core State Standards and the student reading behaviors they require, in addition to characteristics of text.

Teachers use explicit entry requirements to assess each student individually to find baseline reading level. The student's baseline reading level is the highest level passage s/he is able to read comfortably, with 99-100% word recognition, expression and fluency, while answering basic comprehension (Common Core State Standard 1) and vocabulary questions (Common Core State Standard 4) appropriate to the level. Once a teacher is familiar with the IRLA, a student's baseline reading level can usually be determined by the teacher in a 10-15 minute, one-to-one session.

In order to quickly determine at which level to begin testing, the teacher uses locators which take only a minute or two to administer. For grades K-2, this is a phonics locator. For grades 3-12, this is an academic vocabulary locator. Students then read a passage at the level suggested by the locator. While only one passage is used initially, four passages are supplied for each level: two literary, two informational. Each passage has two questions: Basic Comprehension and Making Inferences (CCSS 1). Grades 3-12 passages include a third question: Inferring Reasonable Word Meaning (CCSS 4). Grades K-2 testing includes additional reading readiness, phonics and sight word checks.

After emergent levels, entrance to baseline reading levels require the student to demonstrate proficiency with CCSS1: "Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text," and CCSS4: "Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone."

Once a baseline reading level is determined, students work to increase that level, while learning to apply all the thinking required in the Common Core Reading Standards, 1-10, to various levels of text appropriate to various instructional settings.

2. Technical Documentation Related to Psychometric Properties

A. Estimates of reliability

The IRLA is administered on an individual basis; different students take different groups of items. While individual items have been shown to yield stable results over time, it is impossible to calculate the internal consistency (e.g., KR-20 or coefficient alpha) for groups of items, given the small numbers of students responding to any specific group of items.

B. Evidence that the assessment has items of varied difficulty that cover the expected ability distribution

Alignment and user experience surveys (discussed in parts 3 and 4 of this report) indicated that the progression of difficulty across levels was appropriate. This claim is validated when teachers indicate that items at different levels accurately reflect student growth.

C. Estimates of error in measurement

As estimates of error in measurement are derived from reliability coefficients (see above), it was not possible to calculate standard errors of measurement for IRLA.

D. Validity evidence: construct and criterion-related validity

MI analyzed student test score data from Riverside Elementary School in Rochester, Minnesota, grades K-5. The data were collected at specific time periods over two school years, from fall 2012 to winter 2014. While all the data come from a single school, we think the

analyses yield positive validity evidence and offer a degree of confidence with respect to the interpretation and use of IRLA test scores.

Riverside Elementary School teachers administered not only the IRLA but also the NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) reading assessment at five intervals from 2012 to 2014, namely in fall 2012, winter 2013, spring 2013, fall 2013, and winter 2014. The NWEA reading assessment has been widely used by U.S. schools for some 20 years. Because both the IRLA and NWEA assessments produce scores on growth scales that stretch across grades, we calculated the correlations at each of the five time intervals across all grades. The results show a very strong relationship between student’s scores on the IRLA and NWEA. The correlations are .88, .88, .88, .88, and .90, respectively, across the five assessment intervals, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations between IRLA and NWEA across Time Intervals

| Time Interval | Correlation between IRLA and NWEA |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | 0.88 |
| 2 | 0.88 |
| 3 | 0.88 |
| 4 | 0.88 |
| 5 | 0.90 |

This strong criterion-related evidence indicates that the IRLA is measuring reading in a similar fashion as the NWEA tests. Moreover, because the correlations are so consistent, we can be confident that the scores are quite reliable both at single points in time and over a span of up to two years.

E. Validity evidence: sensitivity to growth

MI examined the average scores of the Riverside students across the five time intervals. Because the IRLA test scores are reported with a continuous growth scale, one would expect to

see test scores increase from one interval to the next. The average scale scores across grades can be seen in Table 2 (together with the respective standard deviations and number of students who had scores for each of the four time intervals). Only students who had scores for both testing times, e.g., fall 2012 and winter 2013, were included when examining a given time interval, e.g., fall 2012 to winter 2013. (This explains why the means for winter 2013, spring 2013, and fall 2013 do not match).

Table 2: Average IRLA scale scores across grades at different time intervals

| | Fall 2012 to Winter 2013 | | Winter 2013 to Spring 2013 | | Spring 2013 to Fall 2013 | | Fall 2013 to Winter 2014 | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|
| | Fall 2012 | Winter 2013 | Winter 2013 | Spring 2013 | Spring 2013 | Fall 2013 | Fall 2013 | Winter 2014 |
| Mean | 1.36 | 2.05 | 2.00 | 2.52 | 2.49 | 2.25 | 1.81 | 2.43 |
| SD | 1.18 | 1.20 | 1.25 | 1.34 | 1.35 | 1.34 | 1.54 | 1.52 |
| N | 304 | 304 | 343 | 343 | 362 | 362 | 600 | 600 |

In general, the mean scores of the Riverside students do indeed increase between the time periods. In other words, IRLA appears to capture student growth in reading proficiency quite well. For example, students’ mean score in fall 2012 is 1.36, while their score the following winter is 2.05. The one exception is the decline in means from spring 2013 (2.49) to fall 2013 (2.25). This anomaly could be due to sampling error, measurement error, or actual regression in student reading ability over the summer months. Alexander, Entwistle, and Olson (2001) have identified a “summer slide” in reading skills as a phenomenon seen particularly in students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are benefitting from reading instruction in school, but regress in reading skill during the summer months when they lack access to

reading material and instruction. In any case, the students’ scores reveal a rather clear pattern of increased growth in reading skills, which is what parents and educators want to see and document.

MI’s analysis of student data therefore supports ARC’s claim that the IRLA can be used to find a valid and reliable baseline (independent) reading level, PK–12. IRLA scores were strongly correlated with NWEA scores and reflected student reading growth in reading proficiency over time.

F. Validity evidence: content validity

MI content specialists reviewed the IRLA to evaluate its content, with four separate content experts reviewing grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and HS. Content specialists used MI’s standard in-house guidelines for reviewing test materials for appropriate content, including:

- Are reading passages appropriate to the grade level based on a qualitative assessment of reading difficulty?
- Do assessment items match content specifications (CCSS standards)?
- Do assessment items measure important skills?
- Are assessment items appropriately difficult for the grade level?
- Are assessment items clearly worded?

All MI reviewers agreed that the IRLA content was grade-level appropriate and that it posed no content or issues that would affect its validity as an assessment of student reading ability. A selection of additional MI reviewer comments is provided in Appendix 1.

Additionally, an expert review by Dr. Kristin Conradi of North Carolina State University found that the IRLA could be used to find a valid and reliable baseline reading level:

The IRLA framework can be used to find a valid and reliable baseline for independent reading levels, PK-12. For early levels (RTM-2G), using the phrase “independent reading level” might be a bit of an oxymoron, as IRLA readily concedes the “training wheels” are on (p.23). That said, the comprehensive focus on emergent literacy skills such as book

habits, print concepts, high frequency words, and various aspects of phonics moves students towards becoming readers.

Starting with level 1B, IRLA's method for establishing an independent reading level places central importance on a student's accuracy and comprehension. This method proves consistent with traditional methods often employed in informal reading inventories (e.g., Leslie & Caldwell, 2010) and extends back to the work of Betts (1946). The word reading accuracy criterion in IRL (98-100%) is consistent with Betts (1946) and with the Fountas & Pinnell (2009) benchmark assessment system ...

The IRLA framework's attention to comprehension — at all levels — is far superior to traditional informal reading inventories. The assessment of reading comprehension has often been criticized — with good reason: comprehension is multidimensional and complex (Fletcher, 2006). Other leveling frameworks tend to rely on oversimplified measures (such as retelling), which are confounded by issues of memory and language. Even comprehension questions can be problematic, as they often have issues of cultural validity (Basterra, Trumbull, & Solano-Flores, 2011) or fail to address higher-level comprehension skills (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). In the IRLA, the framework for assessing comprehension is much more nuanced. For example, students are asked to determine themes, character motivations, and word meanings, and summarize the gist of texts, all the while grounding their answers with evidence from the text. While more laborious for teachers to administer, the process mimics real comprehension better than typical measures do — **thus serving as a more valid representation of the child's understanding of the text** — and the information yielded will be useful for teachers.

In addition to the comprehensive take on comprehension, there are two other ways in which IRLA offers more nuanced (and therefore more valid) information about a reader's independent levels. First, IRLA moves beyond considerations of accuracy and comprehension alone, adding a focus on other factors. This includes a consideration of phonics (for levels 1G/2G through 2R) and academic vocabulary (for levels WT through GL). Both of these areas are provided as supplements to determining reading levels.

Second, many existing frameworks have moved away from establishing independent reading levels for grades at the middle and high school levels. For example, the Qualitative Reading Inventory-5 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2010) have levels up through 6th grade and then have one level representing Upper Middle School and one level representing high school. IRLA presents a much needed and significant departure from these by having more nuanced levels at the upper grades. Notably — and importantly — these levels are not always based on distinguishable differences in text difficulty, but about what the reader can do with the text — “sophistication at which they can analyze author's craft over a variety of genres.”

Dr. Conradi's full review can be seen in Appendix 2.

G. Evidence that the assessment does not exhibit bias toward any major subgroups

MI content specialists reviewed the IRLA for bias using standard guidelines for ensuring that passages and items used on assessments are bias-free. Content specialists used MI's standard in-house guidelines for reviewing test content for bias, including:

- Do reading passages or assessment items contain any material that would be offensive to any group? (Gender, Racial/Ethnic, Religious, Age, Socioeconomic, Cultural, Disability, Regional)
- Do reading passages or assessment items present individuals or groups in a stereotyped or negative way?
- Do reading passages or assessment items contain material to which one group would have greater access than another group?
- Do assessment items contain words that might mean different things to different groups?

No evidence of bias was found in the suggested assessment items, providing further evidence of content-related validity. One reviewer identified a cold read passage mentioning ghosts as potentially religiously offensive to some groups, and additionally identified two passages mentioning potentially sensitive subjects (death and violence). Users of the IRLA will need to exercise their own judgment in determining which reading passages are appropriate for students in their community and classroom.

3. Alignment to the Common Core State Standards and Support for Teaching the Common Core

A. Evidence of alignment to the Common Core State Standards

All MI content specialists who reviewed the IRLA agreed that the IRLA was well aligned to the Common Core State Standards for Reading at each grade level. In addition, Dr. Conradi's review identified alignment to the CCSS as one of the IRLA's strengths:

The IRLA is clearly grounded in the Common Core State Standards, with explicit connections made to specific standards throughout. This is a decided strength of the

framework: teachers and school leaders will [no] doubt appreciate the explicitness of the connections. The use of informational texts for some of the cold reads further underscores the central importance the Common Core places on moving beyond narrative literature only.

To further assess the IRLA's alignment to the Common Core State Standards, MI surveyed teachers and reading specialists using a survey instrument based on the EQuIP rubric developed by Achieve/CCSSO. This rubric has been made available online by Achieve/CCSSO as a tool for educators and administrators to use in reviewing potential instructional and assessment materials.

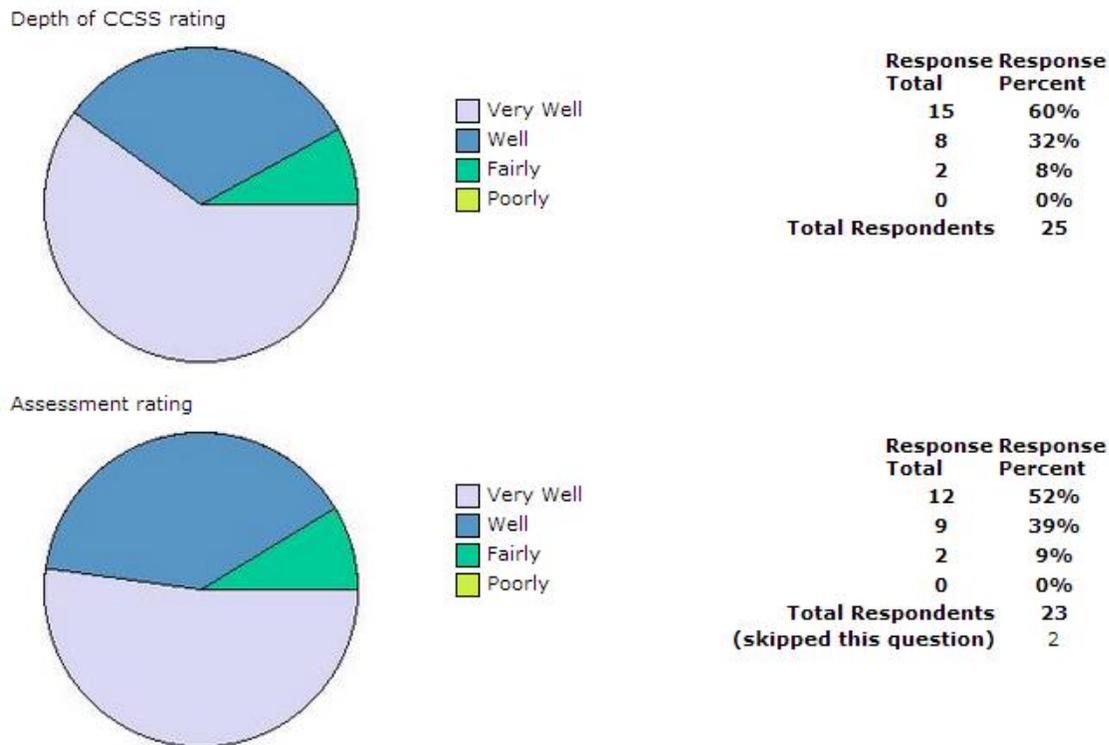
The Achieve rubrics available were specific to curricula, lessons/units, and assessments. The assessment rubric was identified as appropriate for large-scale summative assessments, but not well fitted to measuring the alignment of a formative assessment tool like the IRLA that directly supports instruction. For that reason, the EQuIP rubric designed for lessons and units, which included criteria for rating both instructional support and assessment, was modified to create a survey instrument appropriate to the IRLA (Appendix 3).

Potential survey respondents were selected from a list of knowledgeable users of the IRLA identified by ARC staff. Twenty-five respondents (teachers, reading specialists, and school administrators) completed the survey, which was made available to respondents online between December 3, 2013, and January 15, 2014.

Overall, respondents overwhelmingly rated the IRLA as aligned to the CCSS in both Depth of CCSS (how well the IRLA aligns with the letter and the spirit of the CCSS), and Assessment (how well the IRLA assesses whether students are developing standards-based

skills), as shown in Figure 1. The percentage of respondents rating the IRLA as “very well” or “well” aligned was 92% for Depth of CCSS and 91% for Assessment.

Figure 1



In addition to rating materials on overall alignment, the EQuIP rubric includes 45 individual criteria for alignment. Survey participants were asked to rate the IRLA on each individual criterion. 100% of respondents to the alignment survey agreed or strongly agreed that the IRLA satisfied 13 of the individual criteria listed on the EQuIP Rubric for alignment to the CCSS. Additionally, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the IRLA satisfied 29 of the remaining 31 individual rubric criteria for alignment to the CCSS. Overall, the results support the conclusion that the IRLA is well aligned to the CCSS.

B. Evidence that the IRLA helps teachers get to know the Common Core

Because the IRLA is built on the Common Core State Standards, one of the ways it can

improve instruction is by helping teachers become familiar with the CCSS. Several users noted in alignment survey comments that using the IRLA had helped them get to know the Common Core: “IRLA was really the first encounter I had with the new Common Core standards. I love the question stems for each standard,” “It improved the content of what I taught because of learning the ELA common core available to me in the IRLA,” “It has helped make me intimately aware of the common core reading standards on a deeply meaningful level,” and “because the IRLA informed me about the standards, I was able to focus my instruction on them.”

One teacher writes:

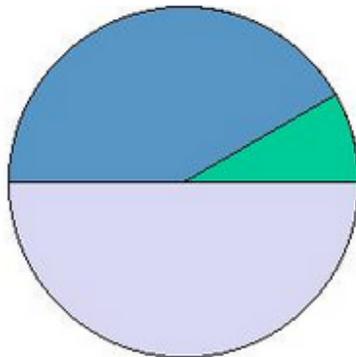
With the IRLA showing the scaffolding on the Common Core Standards it also drives my whole group teaching. I take the standards and break them up for the year in an order of progression that I feel makes sense. With the IRLA, I am then able to see what kids coming into 4th grade should be able to do and what kids going into 5th grade need to be able to do. Some of the standards I break apart and scaffold throughout the year just to accomplish the one standard in multiple parts...again the IRLA has great questions at each color level the break the skill down into smaller pieces that let me see if a student has truly mastered the skill.

C. Evidence that the IRLA helps teachers improve their instruction by moving them to the 3 Shifts in the Common Core

Alignment survey respondents overwhelmingly rated the IRLA highly in Key Shifts in the CCSS — how well the IRLA supports teachers in making the instructional shifts required in moving from earlier standards to the CCSS — and Instructional Supports, how well the IRLA helps teachers respond to varied learning needs. The percentage of respondents rating the IRLA as “very well” or “well” aligned was 92% for Key Shifts in the CCSS and 93% for Instructional Supports, as shown in Figure 2

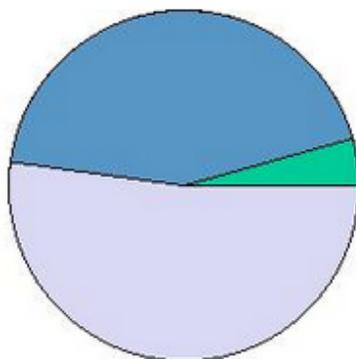
Figure 2

Key shifts in CCSS rating



| | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | 12 | 50% |
| | 10 | 42% |
| | 2 | 8% |
| | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | 24 | |
| (skipped this question) | 1 | |

Instructional Supports rating



| | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | 12 | 52% |
| | 10 | 43% |
| | 1 | 4% |
| | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | 23 | |
| (skipped this question) | 2 | |

4. Educational Effectiveness

MI assessed the effectiveness of the IRLA for stakeholders in the educational process using the IRLA User Experience survey, conducted online between January 28, 2014 and May 21, 2014. It consisted of 18 questions, with respondents asked for open-ended comments after each rating scale question.

Participants were drawn from a list of IRLA users provided by ARC. Out of 36 total respondents, 18 identified themselves as classroom teachers or reading specialists, and 18 as administrators. All participants had experience using the IRLA in their schools, with the mean number of years respondents reported having used the IRLA being 2.8. Survey results are discussed below; full survey results can be seen in Appendix 4.

Three teachers also provided case studies documenting how using the IRLA in their classrooms had improved their instruction or helped their students achieve (full case studies appear in Appendix 7).

A. The IRLA provides diagnostic information on each student that is useful to students, parents, teachers and administrators

A strong majority of survey respondents agreed to questions assessing the IRLA’s usefulness as a diagnostic tool providing information for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Results from this portion of the survey are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

| Survey question | Respondents presented with question | Percentage "agree" or "strongly agree" |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Using the IRLA helps me identify students who need additional help with reading. | Teachers | 94% |
| Using the IRLA helps me assign students to particular classrooms or teachers. | Administrators | 83% |
| Using the IRLA helps me predict how students will do on end-of-grade tests. | Teachers and administrators | 83% |
| Using the IRLA helps students know how well they are doing in mastering reading skills. | Teachers and administrators | 97% |
| Using the IRLA helps students know what skills they need to practice to advance to the next reading level. | Teachers and administrators | 92% |
| Using the IRLA helps me communicate with parents about student progress. | Teachers and administrators | 97% |

Additionally, to assess student knowledge of their reading level and power goals, teachers were asked to optionally select five students in their classroom and ask each student “What is your reading level right now?” (IRLA level) and “What is the one thing you need to work on right now to improve your reading?” (power goal). Teachers were then asked to indicate if students had correctly identified their reading level. A total of 11 teachers and 55 students participated in this portion of the survey.

92% of students correctly stated their IRLA reading level when asked, and 94% of students named a goal when asked what one thing they needed to work on right now. Identified goals included better comprehension, learning more vocabulary, increasing independent reading practice and stamina, reading a wider variety of genres, and specific reading skills and strategies. All student responses to this question can be seen in Appendix 6.

Dr. Conradi’s expert review specifically identified the IRLA as useful in providing diagnostic information for all stakeholders in the education process:

Many popular assessment frameworks provide specific information about a child’s reading, but the information fails to be useful for a teacher. For example, after administering DIBELS measures (Good & Kaminski, 2002), a teacher might recognize that a group of her students are below benchmark in Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), but have no clue what to do with that information. Along similar lines, though many informal reading inventories include comprehension questions that rely on both explicit and implicit reasoning, knowing that a child scored 0/4 for the “implicit” questions does not necessarily provide the teacher with appropriate and applicable diagnostic information.

The intuitiveness and transparency of IRLA is probably the most beneficial aspect of the framework and will serve parents, teachers, and administrators well. **Because both foundational level and comprehension standards are unpacked in the assessments, teachers can immediately use information to then inform instruction and help their students make progress.** The *Student Action Planner: Goal Setting* and the conference forms should be particularly useful for teachers. The included focus on reading habits and exposure to genre will be helpful for parents. Most areas (foundational skills, morphology, comprehension, academic language) are very clear and provide immediate and relevant diagnostic information for a teacher to use.

B. The IRLA helps track student progress in real time

The IRLA provides a framework for tracking student progress from reading level to reading level as well as for tracking student mastery of skills within a reading level. A strong majority of survey respondents agreed that the IRLA was useful for tracking student progress and communicating about student progress within the school. Results from this portion of the survey are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

| Survey question | Respondents presented with question | Percentage "agree" or "strongly agree" |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Using the IRLA helps me track student progress. | Teachers | 100% |
| Using the IRLA helps me track student progress schoolwide. | Administrators | 100% |
| Using the IRLA helps me communicate with other teachers about student progress. | Teachers | 94% |

C. The IRLA helps teachers learn to teach reading

As shown in Table 5, a majority of survey participants agreed that using the IRLA improved their teaching and helped them learn to teach reading and train other teachers.

Table 5

| Survey question | Respondents presented with question | Percentage "agree" or "strongly agree" |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Using the IRLA has helped me learn to teach reading. | Teachers | 77% |
| Using the IRLA has improved my teaching of reading. | Teachers | 100% |
| Using the IRLA has helped me train other teachers to teach reading. | Teachers | 89% |

In her case study of using the IRLA in her classroom, Rebecca Mecikalski writes:

The IRLA has completely changed how I teach, assess and manage reading in my classroom. When we first adopted the IRLA I was impressed simply with the ability [to] accurately level a student’s reading ability to be sure they were in the correct level for independent reading. That one piece was a huge step in getting children to read – find books they COULD read. That solved the problem for many reluctant readers to simply begin enjoying reading because they could accurately get through a book and understand it. For me, it gave me a true indication of where I needed to start my instruction. If I had a child reading at a second grade color level it drastically changed what I could ask of the student when it came to independent work.

The next piece that became so critical was knowing what each child was missing in each color level to advance their reading to the next level. Before the IRLA, I may have known there was a problem, but many times I didn’t know how to go about finding the problem, or what to do once I knew what the problem was identified. Now, with the IRLA, I have the tools to determine what reading level the child is at, checklists and task to complete in the IRLA for that color level to help identify where the learning gap is located, and the former IRLA levels to help me go back and instruct to the student on the missing skill. All of this is provided in one resource. I don’t have to go out and search for these things on my own. I may not always find the instructing tool that I need in the IRLA but with all the color levels available, once I find the gap in a students learning I can go to other educators in my building for support on the instruction piece.

D. The IRLA helps teachers get to know their students

The IRLA relies on independent conferencing with students to identify baseline reading levels and set goals for reading improvement. A majority of teachers identified the IRLA as increasing the amount of time they spent working individually with students, as shown in

Table 6.

Table 6

| Survey question | Respondents presented with question | Percentage "agree" or "strongly agree" |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend in individual conferences with students. | Teachers | 94% |
| Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend working individually with students on their reading goals. | Teachers | 83% |

One challenge identified by some respondents was finding time in the instructional day for conferences; respondents felt that reading conferences using the IRLA were valuable, but were not always able to spend as much time in conference with students as they would have preferred to do. This may in part be a function of experience. Rebecca Mecikalski writes:

My 2nd and especially my 3rd year with the IRLA I noticed a great difference in my conferencing with the students. The first year and part of the 2nd I just spent the time trying to figure out what to talk about and how to get it done in 7 minutes or less. Later in the 2nd year and into the 3rd I sort of perfected a rhythm of how to conference. Now, I always start out with genres – making sure that kids read a wide variety in their color level. After a student is demonstrating mastery of that I dive in to whatever skill we are working on in class for that week or a prior week. If I look in my IRLA notes and see that a child did not show mastery of a skill taught whole group, I conference about that skill and have them demonstrate mastery. If the child is a color level above grade level, then I look at the same skill and see how it advances in the next color level and have them work on showing mastery in that area. I always build the conference off of whatever we are working on in class – I don't want them focusing on two separate skills...keep it connected!

With that plan, I am easily able to conference in 7min. or less. The only time I find I need more time for conferencing is when I am doing level checks for moving kids to the next color band. I also use a reading conference log. It has space to record the conference date, [one] strength, their goal they are working on, and an action plan for reaching that goal. It helps me keep track of my conferencing and it keeps the kids accountable for their own learning and goals. At any time, a total stranger should be able to ask them their reading goal and they should know what they are working on or be able to pull out their conference sheet to refresh their memories. This is another tool that keeps conference short – because we are always on track and know exactly what we are conferencing about that day.

In another case study, Jacolyn McCoy writes that using the IRLA for individual conferences allowed one of her students to achieve success at reading for the first time:

The story that I hold dear to my heart has been two years in the making. (I taught 9th grade English last year and am teaching 10th grade this year) “Suzy” was a freshman last year and hated to read. It was a struggle! So we went through the IRLA (orange level) page by page. She insisted she could do everything on it (I told her to prove it) so

she went over to the book shelf, chose an orange level book (girl drama theme) read it in a week. By the next week she had note book pages of notes answering the all items on her skill card. We conferenced and she proceeded to do the same with a non-fiction novel! I keep a list behind my desk of all the books I've read during the semester. "Suzy" asked about my books, so I brought a few in for her to choose from.

Well to make a long story short, "Suzy" now reads constantly! She has advanced to 2Bronze these past two years! Sometimes she gets in trouble in her other classes because she's reading her books instead of listening – LOL. "Suzy" is a student with a severe learning disability in reading comprehension and decoding. With the one-on-one conferencing and the use of the IRLA, we have come up with strategies that make reading enjoyable and worthwhile for her. She will soon be reading on grade level!

E. The IRLA provides a low-stakes accountability system for schools or districts

Administrators who responded to the User Experience survey identified the IRLA as useful in assessing teaching as well as student progress. 94% of administrators surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that using the IRLA had improved how effectively teachers were teaching reading in their schools.

F. The IRLA helps organize written materials, ensuring all students (at every reading level) have enough things they can read and understand on their own and therefore enough opportunity for sufficient independent reading practice

92% of respondents to the User Experience Survey agreed or strongly agreed that using the IRLA helped students select books for independent reading.

In addition, Dr. Conradi's expert review identified ARC's book leveling system as a strength of the IRLA, while noting that finding enough appropriate texts at the earliest levels may be challenging:

The IRLA provides a system that should certainly ensure that all students have enough materials they can read on their own. The correlation chart presents helpful comparisons of the IRLA levels to well-established other leveling systems. This should provide teachers, librarians, and parents with enough information to then find texts at the child's appropriate independent reading level. It may be somewhat difficult for teachers and parents to match readers with appropriate texts at the earlier levels, however, but this is a problem that many reading leveling programs encounter.

Conclusions

Overall, MI's review of student test scores, survey responses, expert and MI staff review, and teacher case studies supports the following claims about the IRLA:

- It can be used to find a valid and reliable baseline (independent) reading level, PK-12.
- It is built on the Common Core Standards for Reading.
- It helps teachers get to know the Common Core.
- It helps teachers improve their instruction by moving them to the 3 Shifts in the Common Core.
- It provides diagnostic information on each student that is useful to students, parents, teachers and administrators.
- It helps teachers track student progress in real time.
- It helps teachers learn to teach reading.
- It helps teachers get to know their students.
- It provides a low-stakes accountability system for schools or districts.
- It helps organize written materials, ensuring all students (at every reading level) have enough things they can read and understand on their own and therefore enough opportunity for sufficient independent reading practice.

MI's data analysis, content specialist and expert review of the IRLA support its validity for assessment. Content specialist review, expert review, and a survey of teachers also support the IRLA's foundation in the Common Core State Standards.

Survey responses and case studies from users showed user enthusiasm about the IRLA's usefulness as a tool for teachers and administrators that allows them to track student progress, provides diagnostic information about students, and encourages teachers to conference individually with students to monitor and guide their progress, while supporting instruction and independent reading practice.

Identified challenges in using the IRLA centered on the need to make time for student conferencing and the need for student data to be tracked consistently in order to provide accurate diagnostic information and accurate predictions of success on other assessments.

When IRLA scores are tracked consistently, as at Riverside Elementary School, they provide a

valid and reliable measure of student reading ability that allows teachers and administrators to track student growth and accurately assess student progress toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards.

References

Alexander, K. L., Entwistle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2001, Summer). Schools, achievement, and inequality: A seasonal perspective. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(2), 171-191.

Carnine, D.W., J. Silbert, E.J. Kame'enui, S. G. Tarver (2004). *Direct Instruction Reading*. Prentice Hall.

Green, S. (Undated). "Reading Acquisition." University of Kansas. Retrieved from http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=instruction/reading_acquisition.

Appendix 1: MI content/bias/alignment reviewer comments

PreK – grade 2:

- IRLA coordinates very well with CCSS and uses the direct text from the standards.
- The Phonics and Academic Vocabulary Leveling activities make the assessments are quick and easy to use.
- The cold read texts vary between fiction and nonfiction and seem to ask similar questions in the comprehension section.
- This would be a very beneficial resource for educators and literacy specialists, and serve as a consistent assessment tool and tracking system.

Grades 3-5:

- In my review of grades 3-5, I think this is right on track. It gives educators a straightforward guide for CCSS-based instruction. This is a great resource, as each set builds upon the other...there is an entrance and exit action plan for each grade level. This shows that a student must hit specific goals in order to move on.
- Some passages present potential sensitivity issues. This may not be as much of a problem in a classroom setting as it would be on a large-scale summative assessment, as teachers would be able to discuss the topic with students if necessary.
 - GR3: One passage mentions dying. Another passage is on the topic of death.
 - GR4: One passage is about ghosts.
 - GR5: One passage mentions violence (a cat is shot with a rubber band).

Grades 6-8:

- The entry requirements, transition points, and exit requirements are extremely helpful with the CCSS. The CCSS builds upon each level from year to year. Having the entry/exit requirements and transition points would be useful and helpful to a teacher.
- The CCSS is spelled out very clearly and accurately in the book. Having questions to go along with each standard will be helpful not only to a teacher, but also to a content specialist.
- The passages and questions seem appropriate and right on target for middle school students.
- Overall, book seems very reasonable to me. The most important pieces are the entry requirements, transition points, and exit requirements.

High School:

- The texts seem appropriate ... I liked the fact that one of their goals was to have the student be able to comprehend and interpret longer works.
- The sample questions they include are well-phrased and appropriately in-depth. Overall I'd say this appears to be on the right track.

Appendix 2: Expert Review by Dr. Kristin Conradi

1. Can the IRLA be used to find a valid and reliable baseline (independent) reading level, PK-12?

The IRLA framework can be used to find a valid and reliable baseline for independent reading levels, PK-12. For early levels (RTM-2G), using the phrase “independent reading level” might be a bit of an oxymoron, as IRLA readily concedes the “training wheels” are on (p.23). That said, the comprehensive focus on emergent literacy skills such as book habits, print concepts, high frequency words, and various aspects of phonics moves students towards becoming readers.

Starting with level 1B, IRLA’s method for establishing an independent reading level places central importance on a student’s accuracy and comprehension. This method proves consistent with traditional methods often employed in informal reading inventories (e.g., Leslie & Caldwell, 2010) and extends back to the work of Betts (1946). The word reading accuracy criterion in IRL (98-100%) is consistent with Betts (1946) and with the Fountas & Pinnell (2009) benchmark assessment system, but is considerably higher than others [e.g., Hudson, Lane, & Pullen (2005)] who suggest any text students can read with 95% accuracy is at their independent level.

The benefit of keeping the word recognition criterion high is that it ensures that students can be successful decoding texts at this level and can focus on understanding the text, which is the main goal of reading. This further ensures students will not become frustrated by difficult texts, can build their automatic words recognition, and can build their vocabulary. The downside is that it might unnecessarily limit students’ text choices. Halladay (2012) argues that reader-factors, such as interest, should not be discounted when matching students with texts. [Her work is built on a wide body of research highlighting the role of interest in reading achievement (see Hidi, 2001). This work is also consistent with Common Core’s model for measuring text complexity (see my response to #3 below).] In addition, limiting an independent level to 98% might unfairly disadvantage some readers, who might be proficient decoders, but simply have limited vocabulary.

The IRLA framework’s attention to comprehension –at all levels--- is far superior to traditional informal reading inventories. The assessment of reading comprehension has often been criticized--- with good reason: comprehension is multidimensional and complex (Fletcher, 2006). Other leveling frameworks tend to rely on oversimplified measures (such as retelling), which are confounded by issues of memory and language. Even comprehension questions can be problematic, as they often have issues of cultural validity (Basterra, Trumbull, & Solano-Flores, 2011) or fail to address higher-level comprehension skills (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). In the IRLA, the framework for assessing comprehension is much more nuanced. For example, students are asked to determine themes, character motivations, and word meanings, and summarize the gist of texts, all the while grounding their answers with evidence from the text. While more laborious for teachers to administer, the process mimics real comprehension better than typical measures do ---[thus serving as a more valid representation of the child’s understanding of the text]--- and the information yielded will be useful for teachers.

In addition to the comprehensive take on comprehension, there are two other ways in which IRLA offers more nuanced (and therefore more valid) information about a reader’s independent levels. First, IRLA moves beyond considerations of accuracy and comprehension alone, adding a focus on other factors. This includes a consideration of phonics (for levels 1G/2G through 2R) and academic vocabulary (for levels WT through GL). Both of these areas are provided as supplements to determining reading levels. Second, many existing frameworks have moved away from establishing independent reading levels for grades at the middle and high school levels. For example, the Qualitative Reading Inventory-5 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2010) have levels up through 6th grade and then have one level representing Upper Middle School and one level representing high school. IRLA presents a much needed and significant departure from these by having more nuanced levels at the upper grades. Notably— and importantly-- these levels are not always based on distinguishable differences in text difficulty, but about what the reader can do with the text---“sophistication at which they can analyze author’s craft over a variety of genres.” In evaluating whether I think teachers can use the IRLA to establish a valid reading level for students, I would be remiss if I did not mention that many would argue that rate should be considered when determining this level (see Morris et al., 2013; Rasinski, 1999). If a third grader is reading grade-level material with 99% accuracy, but at a slow pace, even if his comprehension is adequate, Morris and colleagues would argue that the reader’s lack of automaticity signals a problem. At a practical level, the child simply would not be able to keep up with the amount of reading necessary for success in upper elementary school.

2. Does the IRLA provide diagnostic information on each student that is useful to students, parents, teachers and administrators?

Many popular assessment frameworks provide specific information about a child’s reading, but the information fails to be useful for a teacher. For example, after administering DIBELS measures (Good & Kaminski, 2002), a teacher might recognize that a group of her students are below benchmark in Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), but have no clue what to do with that information. Along similar lines, though many informal reading inventories include comprehension questions that rely on both explicit and implicit reasoning, knowing that a child scored 0/4 for the “implicit” questions does not necessarily provide the teacher with appropriate an applicable diagnostic information.

The intuitiveness and transparency of IRLA is probably the most beneficial aspect of the framework and will serve parents, teachers, and administrators well. Because both foundational level and comprehension standards are unpacked in the assessments, teachers can immediately use information to then inform instruction and help their students make progress. The *Student Action Planner: Goal Setting* and the conference forms should be particularly useful for teachers. The included focus on reading habits and exposure to genre will be helpful for parents. Most areas (foundational skills, morphology, comprehension, academic language) are very clear and provide immediate and relevant diagnostic information for a teacher to use. One area—fluency—is less developed. In my answer to the first question, I noted that some would advocate for the use of rate in determining someone’s reading level. Along similar lines, the IRLA provides scant information for teachers to make sense of their readers’ rate and prosody—both important aspects of fluency. Teachers are asked to indicate *if* the student has “appropriate rate and expression”---but no detail about what *is* appropriate rate and expression is provided. This compromises the usefulness of the diagnosis for teachers. This could easily be remedied by offering some frameworks for appropriate reading rates (e.g., Hasbrouk & Tindal, 2005; Rasinski, 1999) and prosody (e.g., Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Of note, there are a couple of areas that likely could cause confusion. For example, on page 94, in an assessment of foundational skills, some common long vowel patterns are incorrectly presented. (Instead of ee, ea, ai, oa, the vowel teams are presented with a dash in between—e-e, e-a, a-l, o-a; this could very easily confuse teachers, which in turn might compromise instruction). In addition, it is unclear what the diagnostic benefit would be of including phonics patterns in isolation, instead of in the context of words¹. [If I want to know whether Johnny can decode *-ap*, it would be more useful for this to be included in the context of the word, *cap*.] In using real words, teachers would avoid issues with decoding patterns such as *-ass* (level 1B) and the framework would not mislead teachers into thinking it would be useful to teach students phonics patterns in isolation. [Hopefully this is avoided since Vowel Word Family Practice examples are provided to the teachers.]

3. Is the IRLA built on the Common Core Standards for Reading?

The IRLA is clearly grounded in the Common Core State Standards, with explicit connections made to specific standards throughout. This is a decided strength of the framework: teachers and school leaders will know doubt appreciate the explicitness of the connections. The use of informational texts for some of the cold reads further underscores the central importance the Common Core places on moving beyond narrative literature only. Of note, there is one area where some might debate the connection of the IRLA to the Common Core: its very focus on establishing an “independent” reading level. Designers of the Common Core State Standards created them with the intention that students be able to grapple with complex texts. It is possible that IRLA might lead teachers to keep students at text levels that are too easy for them for too long, which is counter to the very objectives of CCSS. On the other hand, the IRLA makes specific references to this notion of text complexity, with teachers evaluating students’ book habits, home reading, and working to build students’ stamina and exposure to a variety of genres.

In general, there is a decided lack of consensus on whether students should be constrained to certain levels of texts, with more research needed (Cunningham, 2013; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013), but any leveling system is somewhat complicated by the fact that a text difficulty is “...a function of the interaction among reader, text, and task factors” (Wixson & Valencia, p. 431, 2014). The Common Core presents a three-part model to measure text

¹ In my review of IRLA, it seems that most of the time, phonics knowledge is evaluated in the context of real words, but in certain cases (e.g., Level 1B) it is not.

complexity: this model, which includes considerations of the reader and task, does not necessarily cohere with the more straightforward approach the IRLA has in determining independent reading levels.

4. Does the IRLA help organize written materials, ensuring all students (at every reading level) have enough things they can read and understand on their own and therefore enough opportunity for sufficient independent reading practice?

The IRLA provides a system that should certainly ensure that all students have enough materials they can read on their own. The correlation chart presents helpful comparisons of the IRLA levels to well-established other leveling systems. This should provide teachers, librarians, and parents with enough information to then find texts at the child's appropriate independent reading level. It may be somewhat difficult for teachers and parents to match readers with appropriate texts at the earlier levels, however, but this is a problem that many reading leveling programs encounter.

References

- Betts, E.A. (1946). *Foundations of reading instruction, with emphasis on differentiated guidance*. New York: American Book Company.
- Cunningham, J.W. (2013). Research on text complexity: The Common Core State Standards as a catalyst. In S.B. Neuman & L.B. Gambrell (Eds.), *Quality reading instruction in the age of the Common Core Standards*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association
- Good, R. H., & Kaminski, R. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills (6th ed.)*. Retrieved from <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>
- Fletcher, J. M. (2006). Measuring reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 10*, 323-330.
- Halladay, J.L. (2012). Revisiting key assumptions of the reading level framework. *The Reading Teacher, 66*, 53-62.
- Hidi, S. (2001). Interest, reading, and learning: Theoretical and practical considerations. *Educational Psychology Review, 13*, 191-209.
- Hiebert, E. H., & Mesmer, H. A. E. (2013). Upping the Ante of Text Complexity in the Common Core State Standards: Examining Its Potential Impact on Young Readers. *Educational Researcher, 42*(1), 44-51. doi: 10.3102/0013189x12459802
- Kintsch, W., & Kintsch, E. (2005). Comprehension. In S. G. Paris & S. A. Stahl. (Eds.), *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 71-92). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Leslie, L., & Caldwell, J.S., (2010). *Qualitative Reading Inventory (5th Ed.)*. Pearson: Boston, MA.
- Morris, D., Trathen, W., Frye, E. M., Kucan, L., Ward, D., Schlagal, R., & Hendrix, M. (2013). The role of reading rate in the informal assessment of reading ability. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 52*, 52-64. doi: 10.1080/19388071.2012.702188
- Rasinski, T. V. (1999). Exploring a method for estimating independent, instructional, and frustration reading rates. *Journal of Reading Psychology, 20*, 61-69.
- Wixson, K.K., & Valencia, S.W. (2014). CCSS-ELA: Suggestions and cautions for addressing text complexity. *Reading Teacher, 67*, 430-434.
- Zutell, J., & Rasinski, T. V. (1991). Training teachers to attend to their students' oral reading fluency. *Theory Into Practice, 30*, 211-217.

Appendix 3: Alignment survey questions

Name:

School:

Which best describes your role in your school? (classroom teacher, reading specialist, school administrator)

Which grade level do you primarily teach? (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, high school)

Alignment to the Depth of the CCSS

The next several questions address **Alignment to the Depth of the Common Core Standards for Reading**. **Alignment to the Depth of the Common Core** refers to how well the IRLA aligns with the letter and the spirit of the CCSS. Please consider each question carefully, and provide any comments that you think would be useful. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)**

1. The IRLA targets a set of grade-level CCSS ELA/Literacy standards.
2. The IRLA helps teachers set a clear and explicit purpose for instruction.
3. The IRLA supports teachers in selecting texts that measure within the grade-level complexity band and are of sufficient quality (similar to CCSS grade-level exemplars).
4. The IRLA supports teachers in setting learning goals for the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening.
5. The IRLA supports teachers in setting learning goals for students' as they build content knowledge and their understanding of reading and writing in various subjects .The IRLA supports teachers in providing learning goals for students as they present ideas and information through writing and/or drawing and speaking experiences.
6. The IRLA emphasizes the explicit, systematic development of foundational literacy skills.
7. The IRLA provides learning goals for specific fluency-building techniques supported by research (for example, monitored partner reading, choral reading, following along in the text when teacher or other fluent reader is reading aloud).
8. Overall, how well do you think the IRLA aligns to the depth of the CCSS? (very well, well, fairly, poorly)
9. Please provide any additional comments you may have about the IRLA's alignment to the depth of the CCSS.

Key Shifts in the Common Core

The next several questions address **Key Shifts in the Common Core**. **Key Shifts in the Common Core** refers to how well the IRLA supports teachers in making the instructional shifts required in moving from earlier standards to the CCSS. Please consider each question carefully, and provide any comments that you think would be useful. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)**

10. The IRLA helps teachers provide specific feedback as student learn to read texts closely, examine textual evidence, and discern deep meaning .
11. The IRLA helps teachers facilitate rich and rigorous evidence-based discussions and writing about texts through a sequence of specific, thought-provoking, and text-dependent questions.
12. The IRLA supports teachers in expecting students to draw evidence from texts to produce clear and coherent writing that informs, explains, or makes an argument.
13. The IRLA supports a focus on building students' academic vocabulary in context through instruction.
14. The IRLA helps teachers focus students on reading a progression of complex texts drawn from the grade level band.

15. The IRLA supports text-centered learning that is sequenced, scaffolded and supported to advance students toward independent reading.
16. The IRLA supports teacher planning as students build knowledge about a topic or subject through analysis of a coherent selection of strategically sequenced, discipline-specific texts.
17. The IRLA helps teachers make reading texts closely (including read-alouds) a central focus of instruction and supports regular opportunities for students to ask and answer text-dependent questions.
18. The IRLA supports teachers planning for a balance of on-demand and process writing and short, focused research projects.
19. The IRLA supports teachers in the move to include a balance of literary and informational text in instruction.
20. The IRLA helps teachers facilitate rich text-based discussions and writing through specific, thought-provoking questions about texts (including texts read-aloud and an author's use of illustrations).
21. The IRLA supports a focus on explicitly building students' academic vocabulary and concepts of syntax through instruction.
22. The IRLA supports teachers in exposing students to a progression of texts as students learn to read (i.e., additional phonic patterns, increased sentence length).
23. The IRLA supports teachers in setting learning goals for varied writing opportunities that balance communicating thinking and answering questions with expression and exploration.
24. Overall, how well do you think the IRLA supports teachers in making the key instructional shifts in the CCSS? (very well, well, fairly, poorly)
25. Please provide any additional comments you may have about the IRLA's ability to support teachers in making the key shifts in the CCSS.

Instructional Supports

The next several questions address Instructional Supports. Instructional Supports refers to how well the IRLA helps teachers respond to varied learning needs. Please consider each question carefully, and provide any comments that you think would be useful. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

26. The IRLA helps cultivate student interest and engagement in reading, writing and speaking about texts.
27. The IRLA helps teachers set instructional expectations for students and is easy to understand and use.
28. The IRLA helps teachers provide all students with multiple opportunities to engage with text of appropriate complexity for the grade level, with appropriate scaffolding so that all students directly experience the complexity of the text.
29. The IRLA helps teachers focus on challenging sections of text and engage students in a productive struggle through discussion questions and other supports that build toward independence.
30. The IRLA helps integrate into instruction appropriate supports in reading, writing, listening, and speaking for students who are ELL, have disabilities, or read below grade level.
31. The IRLA helps teachers provide extensions and/or more advanced text for students who read above grade level.
32. The IRLA encourages teachers to include a progression of learning where concepts and skills advance or deepen over time.
33. The IRLA encourages teachers to gradually remove supports, requiring students to develop their independent capacities.
34. The IRLA helps teachers provide opportunities for authentic learning, application of literary skills, student-directed inquiry, analysis, evaluation and/or reflection.
35. The IRLA helps teachers make students accountable for independent reading based on student choice and interest.

36. The IRLA encourages teachers to use technology as appropriate to deepen learning and draw attention to evidence and texts as appropriate.
37. The IRLA helps teachers integrate targeted instruction in multiple areas such as grammar and syntax, writing strategies, discussion rules and aspects of foundational reading.
38. The IRLA helps teachers support students who need more time and attention to achieve automaticity with decoding, phonemic awareness, fluency and/or vocabulary acquisition.
39. The IRLA helps teachers provide all students (including emergent and beginning readers) with extensive opportunities to engage in grade-level texts and read-alouds, with appropriate scaffolding so that students directly experience the complexity of text.
40. The IRLA supports a focus on sections of rich text (including read-alouds) that present the greatest challenge, and provide discussion questions and other supports to promote progress toward independence.
41. The IRLA helps teachers provide opportunities for authentic learning, application of literary skills, student-directed inquiry, analysis, evaluation and/or reflection.
42. The IRLA helps teachers integrate targeted instruction in such areas as grammar and conventions, writing strategies, discussion rules and all aspects of foundational reading.
43. Overall, how well do you think the IRLA helps teachers respond to varied student learning needs. (very well, well, fairly, poorly)
44. Please provide any additional comments you may have about the IRLA's ability to help teachers respond to varied student needs.

Assessment

The next several questions address Assessment. Assessment refers to how well the IRLA assesses whether students are developing standards-based skills. Please consider each question carefully, and provide any comments that you think would be useful. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

45. The IRLA elicits direct, observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate the major targeted grade-level CCSS standards with appropriately complex texts.
46. The IRLA assesses student proficiency using methods that are unbiased and accessible to all students.
47. The IRLA includes aligned rubrics or assessment guidelines that provide sufficient guidance for interpreting student performance.
48. The IRLA supports teachers in using varied modes of assessment, including a range of pre-, formative, summative, and self-assessment measures.
49. The IRLA elicits direct, observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate foundational skills and targeted grade-level literacy CCSS.
50. The IRLA includes aligned rubrics or assessment guidelines that provide sufficient guidance for interpreting student performance and responding to areas where students are not yet meeting standards.
51. Overall, how well do you think the IRLA assesses whether students are mastering standards-based content and skills. (very well, well, fairly, poorly)
52. Please provide any additional comments you may have about the IRLA's ability to assess student progress.
53. Please provide any further comments you may have on the IRLA's overall alignment to the Common Core State Standards.

Appendix 4: Educational Effectiveness Survey Questions

(Teachers only):

How long have you used the IRLA?

Do you currently use the IRLA in your classroom or as a reading specialist?

Why did you start using the IRLA?

(Administrators only):

How long have teachers in your school been using the IRLA?

How many teachers in your school use the IRLA in their classrooms or as reading specialists?

Why did your school begin using the IRLA?

(Both teachers and administrators):

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (rating scale + open-ended comments)

Using the IRLA has changed how I teach reading.

Using the IRLA has helped me learn to teach reading.

Using the IRLA has improved my teaching of reading.

Using the IRLA has helped me train other teachers to teach reading.

Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend in individual conferences with students.

Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend working individually with students on their reading goals.

Using the IRLA helps students select books for independent reading.

Using the IRLA helps students know how well they are doing in mastering reading skills.

Using the IRLA helps students know what skills they need to practice to advance to the next reading level.

Using the IRLA helps me predict how students will do on end-of-grade tests.

Using the IRLA helps me communicate with parents about student progress.

(Teachers only):

Using the IRLA helps me track student progress.

Using the IRLA helps me communicate with other teachers about student progress.

Using the IRLA helps me identify students who need additional help with reading.

(Administrators only):

Using the IRLA helps me track student progress schoolwide.

Using the IRLA helps me assess how effectively teachers are teaching reading.

Using the IRLA has improved how effectively teachers are teaching reading in your school.

Using the IRLA helps me assign students to particular classrooms or teachers.

Appendix 5: User Experience Survey responses

1. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has changed how I teach reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 9 | 50% |
| Agree |  | 9 | 50% |
| Disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

2. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has helped me learn to teach reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Disagree |  | 3 | 17% |
| Strongly disagree |  | 1 | 6% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

3. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has improved my teaching of reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 9 | 50% |
| Agree |  | 9 | 50% |
| Disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has helped me train other teachers to teach reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 13 | 36% |
| Agree |  | 19 | 53% |
| Disagree |  | 3 | 8% |
| Strongly disagree |  | 1 | 3% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

5. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend in individual conferences with students.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 12 | 67% |
| Agree |  | 5 | 28% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

6. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has increased the amount of time I spend working individually with students on their reading goals.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 10 | 56% |
| Agree |  | 5 | 28% |
| Disagree |  | 3 | 17% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps students select books for independent reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 18 | 50% |
| Agree |  | 15 | 42% |
| Disagree |  | 2 | 6% |
| Strongly disagree |  | 1 | 3% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps students know how well they are doing in mastering reading skills.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 18 | 50% |
| Agree |  | 17 | 47% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 3% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps students know what skills they need to practice to advance to the next reading level.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 22 | 61% |
| Agree |  | 11 | 31% |
| Disagree |  | 3 | 8% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me predict how students will do on end-of-grade tests.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 9 | 25% |
| Agree |  | 21 | 58% |
| Disagree |  | 6 | 17% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me communicate with parents about student progress.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 26 | 72% |
| Agree |  | 9 | 25% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 3% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 36 | 100% |

12. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me track student progress.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 11 | 61% |
| Agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

13. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me communicate with other teachers about student progress.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 10 | 56% |
| Agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

14. (Teachers only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me identify students who need additional help with reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 14 | 78% |
| Agree |  | 3 | 17% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

15. (Administrators only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me track student progress schoolwide.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 13 | 72% |
| Agree |  | 5 | 28% |
| Disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

16. (Administrators only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me assess how effectively teachers are teaching reading.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 6 | 33% |
| Agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Disagree |  | 5 | 28% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

17. (Administrators only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA has improved how effectively teachers are teaching reading in my school.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 7 | 39% |
| Agree |  | 10 | 56% |
| Disagree |  | 1 | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

18. (Administrators only) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Using the IRLA helps me assign students to particular classrooms or teachers.

| | | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strongly agree |  | 6 | 33% |
| Agree |  | 9 | 50% |
| Disagree |  | 3 | 17% |
| Strongly disagree | | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | 18 | 100% |

Appendix 6: Student-Identified Reading Goals

General Comprehension:

My comprehension - I read something and I don't always understand or remember what I've just read.
focus
thinking about what I am reading
Thinking about what I read

Independent Reading Practice:

learning to use my strategies independently.
i need to read a lot of books
reading at home
Reading for at least 30 min a day
I need to practice reading every day, because I am behind on my steps. I should read one or two extra steps every day.
Umm read more at home. I know I suck at vocabulary and if I read more that will improve.
reading more books
Just reading a lot, because I don't like to read that much.

Vocabulary Building:

Vocabulary building
reading all the 2G words
learning new words
Increasing my vocabulary by using my Bookmark Word Collector and completing a Word Analysis and power words
I have to know my Tricky Words.
I am almost a 1g. I need more words.
all the power words.
all the 1g words and blends

Reading Stamina:

I need to finish one chapter book before I start another one. I read a different book every step. I need to finish a chapter book.
To read a chapter book in one week so I can get to White books.
Completing a book

Broadening Genres:

Reading more genres
I am working on reading various genres.
Reading a variety of genres. I am reading two historical fiction books now and then we are doing a book club with science fiction. Then we meet to talk compare and contrast characters or events. We might pick one of the books to view the movie and compare and contrast the book with the movie.
I'm happy with where I am. I love to read but I guess I could read more non-fiction.

Genres

I read everyday, so I think that I don't have much to improve upon. If I had to do one thing, I think it would be to read a lot of different genres.

Genres

Specific Reading Skills and Strategies:

character traits

practice inferring using clues.

Identifying the implied and stated main ideas in the stories.

My Power Goal is endings.

comparing similar themes

I need to work on the double and single consonant rule.

blends

I need to work on being able to retell the story accurately and with more details.

reading faster

sounding out words

I am working on being able to identify the plot of a story.

I have to stop if something doesn't make sense. I have to reread it.

Identifying the author's point of view in nonfiction

Stopping when something doesn't make sense and reading it again.

remember what I read

I am working on recalling things I learn when I read an informational text.

I am working on challenging 3-syllable words.

I can read the story for the test, but I have trouble understanding what I read when I read a chapter book. So, I am journaling after each chapter.

No Specific Response:

I don't practice reading. I don't really like it. But I know I need to read to get better. everything I'm no good at reading.

Appendix 7: Case Studies

Rebecca Mecikalski

The IRLA has completely changed how I teach, assess and manage reading in my classroom. When we first adopted the IRLA I was impressed simply with the ability the accurately level a student's reading ability to be sure they were in the correct level for independent reading. That one piece was a huge step in getting children to read – find books they COULD read. That solved the problem for many reluctant readers to simply begin enjoying reading because they could accurately get through a book and understand it. For me, it gave me a true indication of where I needed to start my instruction. If I had a child reading at a second grade color level it drastically changed what I could ask of the student when it came to independent work.

The next piece that became so critical was knowing what each child was missing in each color level to advance their reading to the next level. Before the IRLA, I may have known there was a problem but many times I didn't know how to go about finding the problem, or what to do once I knew what the problem was identified. Now, with the IRLA, I have the tools to determine what reading level the child is at, checklists and task to complete in the IRLA for that color level to help identify where the learning gap is located, and the former IRLA levels to help me go back and instruct to the student on the missing skill. All of this is provided in one resource. I don't have to go out and search for these things on my own. I may not always find the instructing tool that I need in the IRLA but with all the color levels available, once I find the gap in a student's learning I can go to other educators in my building for support on the instruction piece.

My 2nd and especially my 3rd year with the IRLA I noticed a great difference in my conferencing with the students. The first year and part of the 2nd I just spend the time trying to figure out what to talk about and how to get it done in 7 minutes or less. Later in the 2nd year and into the 3rd I sort of perfected a rhythm of how to conference. Now, I always start out with genres – making sure that kids read a wide variety in their color level. After a student is demonstrating mastery of that I dive in to whatever skill we are working on in class for that week or a prior week. If I look in my IRLA notes and see that a child did not show mastery of a skill taught whole group, I conference about that skill and have them demonstrate mastery. If the child is a color level above grade level, then I look at the same skill and see how it advances in the next color level and have them work on showing mastery in that area. I always build the conference off of whatever we are working on in class – I don't want them focusing on two separate skills...keep it connected!

With that plan, I am easily able to conference in 7min. or less. The only time I find I need more time for conferencing is when I am doing level checks for moving kids to the next color band. I also use a reading conference log. It has space to record the conference date, 1 strength, their goal they are working on, and an action plan for reaching that goal. It helps me keep track of my conferencing and it keeps the kids accountable for their own learning and goals. At any time, a total stranger should be able to ask them their reading goal and they should know what they are working on or be able to pull out their conference sheet to refresh their memories. This is another tool that keeps conference short – because we are always on track and know exactly what we are conferencing about that day.

With the IRLA showing the scaffolding on the Common Core Standards it also drives my whole group teaching. I take the standards and break them up for the year in an order of progression that I feel makes sense. With the IRLA, I am then able to see what kids coming into 4th grade should be able to do

and what kids going into 5th grade need to be able to do. Some of the standards I break apart and scaffold throughout the year just to accomplish the one standard in multiple parts...again the IRLA has great questions at each color level the break the skill down into smaller pieces that let me see if a student has truly mastered the skill.

All of these things make it very easy to know exactly what skill level a student is, what they are working on, where the holes are in their learning and what the next steps are for that student. I have NEVER known my kids like I do now, and I have never been able to meet the individual needs of students like I am now able to do. I have found that their color levels coordinate exactly to assessments like the NWEA and the MCA results. Nothing has ever had this big of an impact on my reading instruction.

Jacolyn S. McCoy

In my classroom I use the IRLA to conduct individual conferences and to track all the activities/lessons individual students have mastered. My kids benefit from seeing what skills they have mastered and what skills they need to be working on while reading their chosen novels. The skill cards help out with this as well since I give them each one to keep in their novels. You sure do get to know your children and what genres they enjoy reading. I have many students who despise reading non-fiction and it becomes a struggle at times to get them to choose one. The IRLA assists them in seeing what they need to accomplish in order to advance to the next color/level.

Conferences, now that's an amazing feat! I have a weekly schedule posted as to who I will be conferencing with each day. I have students fighting with me to get a conference in because they can't wait any longer to talk about their books!! Love it!

As a teacher with dual certification, the IRLA helps me write IEP goals for my students with a specific learning disability in reading. The IRLA and the Benchmark break down the common cores, which allow me to truly see where my students' strengths and weaknesses lie. More importantly it allows my students to see what goals/objectives they need to work on. Amazingly once they understand where their weaknesses lie; it makes it easier for them to zone in on that targeted skill.

The story that I hold dear to my heart has been two years in the making. (I taught 9th grade English last year and am teaching 10th grade this year) "Suzy" was a freshman last year and hated to read. It was a struggle! So we went through the IRLA (orange level) page by page. She insisted she could do everything on it (I told her to prove it) so she went over to the book shelf, chose an orange level book (girl drama theme) read it in a week. By the next week she had note book pages of notes answering the all items on her skill card. We conferenced and she proceeded to do the same with a non-fiction novel! I keep a list behind my desk of all the books I've read during the semester. "Suzy" asked about my books, so I brought a few in for her to choose from. Well to make a long story short, "Suzy" now reads constantly! She has advanced to 2Bronze these past two years! Sometimes she gets in trouble in her other classes because she's reading her books instead of listening – LOL. "Suzy" is a student with a severe learning disability in reading comprehension and decoding. With the one-on-one conferencing and the use of the IRLA, we have come up with strategies that make reading enjoyable and worthwhile for her. She will soon be reading on grade level! Still can't get her to broaden her reading genre very far though– baby steps.

Susan Williams

IRLA has made a huge difference in my instruction, and has impacted student success greater than anything I have done over the last 20 years! Using IRLA to individualize instruction has allowed students to raise reading levels at an unbelievable rate. My class has a reading growth level of 1.38 years so far, and the students' scores on formative assessments, SuccessMaker levels, and AR tests are proof of their achievement.

We have really created a "reading habit"! Every night, over 75% of my students read more than the 30 minutes. AND, they choose "reading" as their reward when given a choice.

In my opinion, the greatest benefit of using IRLA is that it empowers students to take control of their learning. I get asked at least once daily, how many more points until I get to go to ... (next color level)? Another common question is, "After I learn, vowel combinations, what do I need?" Today, an ELL student asked me how many more days until school was out. I sent him to the calendar. He was so excited when he came back because he said it was enough days to make it to 2R! This child started on RTM last year as a first grader.