

Key Legislative Reading Issues 2010

Executive Summary

The International Reading Association Government Relations Committee sent a survey to state council presidents, state council coordinators, state legislative chairs, and other state leaders in June 2010.

Two types of data analysis were utilized in preparing this report. Quantitative results involved the priority ranking of 10 issues: 1) Availability of reading instructional materials, 2) Federal legislation, 3) Initial preparation, 4) Professional development, 5) Reading certification/licenses, 6) Reading needs of specialized populations, 7) State governmental affairs, 8) State reading issues, 9) State reading standards and tests, 10) Sufficient funding for current books and other print materials, 11) Support for students reading well below their grade placement, and 12) Technology. Qualitative results included comments in all the above areas, most important state issues, and how the International Reading Association could help.

Quantitative results showed that professional development had the highest rank followed in order by Federal legislation, support for students reading well below their grade placement, and reading needs of specialized populations. State governmental affairs, state reading issues, and state reading standards and tests were ranked much higher in 2007 than in 2010.

Quantitative results show that funding is a major problem, reading certification should be emphasized, assessment should provide useful information about instructional needs, Federal programs are not helpful, ongoing appropriate professional development is vital to improving reading instruction, and that teachers should have the latest technology in their classrooms.

The most important state issues are assessment, funding for programs, struggling readers, certification, adolescent reading, and professional development.

The International reading Association can help state councils by providing resources for professional development, supporting legislative efforts, and continuing to seek Federal funding for reading.

Key Legislative Reading Issues 2010

The charges for the 2010-2011 Government Relations Committee are as follows:

1. Develop a system to collect information about emerging needs in the literacy community that can be turned into legislative action.
2. Working with staff, provide a support system for state-level grassroots advocacy which includes:
 - a. the development of advocacy models for use at the state level:
 - b. the development of brief talking point papers for influencing legislative action.
3. Work with staff to implement and expand the participation of new attendees at legislative workshops.
4. Work with staff to continue the Advocacy Awards program.
5. Work with the Washington office of IRA and a select group of IRA Board members to identify legislative issues and set priorities.
6. Work with affiliates and councils outside the United States on advocacy and education policy for their teachers and children.

Based on these charges, the Government Relations Committee developed this report of key legislative reading issues.

Results of Previous Surveys

In 2003 the key state issues were funding/budget, Reading First, No Child Left Behind, and high stakes assessment.

In 2004 the top five key issues were No Child Left Behind, high stakes and other testing, accountability, adequate funding, and highly qualified teachers.

In 2005 the top five key issues were No Child Left Behind, testing, accountability, highly qualified teachers, and standards/benchmarks.

In 2006 the top five key issues were federal legislation, state reading standards and tests, initial preparation of teachers, support for students reading well below their grade placements, and reading needs of specialized populations.

In 2007 the top five key issues were state reading standards and tests, federal legislation, reading needs of specialized populations, support for students reading well below their grade placements, and state government affairs.

Methodology

State council presidents and vice presidents, state IRA coordinators, state legislative chairs, and other key IRA members were sent a survey from the International Reading Association in June, 2010. The survey requested information from respondents concerning their state positions, professional positions, availability of reading instructional materials, federal legislation, initial preparation, professional development, reading certification/licenses, reading needs of specialized populations, state governmental affairs, state reading issues, state reading standards and tests, sufficient funding for current books and other print materials, support for students reading well below their grade placement, technology, the most important reading issue in states, and how the International Reading Association could be of help. A total of 65 surveys were returned

Quantitative Results

Priority Ranking

Respondents ranked the following areas: availability of reading instructional materials, federal legislation, initial preparation, d) professional development, reading certification/licenses, reading needs of specialized populations, state governmental affairs, state reading issues, state reading standards and tests, sufficient funding for current books and other print materials, support for students reading well below their grade placement, and technology. Each area was rated high priority, average priority, or low priority marks.

Table 1 shows the priority ranking by respondents. Respondents marked 63.4 percent of their responses as high priority, 35.5 percent as average priority, and 5 percent low priority. Professional development and federal legislation were ranked as the highest priority areas.

Table 1. Priority Ranking by All Respondents

Area	High Priority	Average Priority	Low Priority
Availability of Reading Instructional Materials	38	21	5
Federal Legislation	50	8	6
Initial Preparation	48	16	1
Professional Development	53	11	0
Reading Certification/Licenses	35	25	4
Reading Needs of Specialized Populations	39	20	6
State Governmental Affairs	31	25	0
State Reading Issues	31	27	5
State Reading Standards and Tests	35	23	1
Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials	37	22	5
Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement	50	12	1
Technology	32	28	4
Total	479 (63.4%)	238 (31.5%)	38 (5.0%)

Table 2 compares the priority rankings by all respondents in 2007 and 2010. The biggest change from 2007 to 2010 was higher ranks for professional development and initial preparation and lower ranks for state government affairs, state reading issues, and state standards and tests. Federal legislation continued to have a high rank.

Table 2. Comparison of 2007 and 2010 Priority Rankings by All Respondents

Area	2007 Rank	2010 Rank
Availability of Reading Instructional Materials	9	6
Federal Legislation State Governmental Affairs	2	2
Initial Preparation	8	4
Professional Development	*	1
Reading Certification/Licenses	7	9
Reading Needs of Specialized Populations	3	5
State Governmental Affairs	5	12
State Reading Issues	5	11
State Reading Standards and Tests	1	8
Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials	10	7
Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement	4	3
Technology	*	10

*Professional development and Technology were not included in the 2007 survey.

Qualitative Results

The 65 respondents to the survey provided 119 comments concerning the reading priorities in their states. Responses to the survey were categorized into themes: a) availability of reading instructional materials, b) federal legislation, c) initial preparation, d) professional development, e) reading certification/licenses, f) reading needs of specialized populations, g) state governmental affairs, h) state reading issues, i) state reading standards and tests, j) sufficient funding for current books and other print materials, k) support for students reading well below their grade placement, and l) technology. The responses were additionally categorized into sub themes for each major theme. Those sub themes are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Themes in Survey Comments

Theme	Frequency	Sub Themes
Availability of Reading Instructional Materials	7	Lack of funding
	2	Funding is adequate
	1	Teachers have little input on the selection of supplementary materials
	1	Teachers need training on how to use supplementary materials
	Total 11	
Federal Legislation	8	Federal programs are not helpful
	1	Federal legislation is important and helpful
	1	IRA should concentrate on reading, not language arts
	1	Lack of understanding of the value of Federal programs by university faculty
	Total 11	

Initial Preparation	3 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 Total 13	Very important Some universities prepare poor reading teachers Mentors important for balanced reading program All teachers should be prepared to teach reading skills Colleges prepare effective teachers but Federal rules and programs make teachers less effective Graduate programs provide good reading teachers, but positions are needed Principals need knowledge and background to provide reading leadership Teacher certification should include student teaching and four years of education program The Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure Foundation of Reading should be used in all states
Professional Development	7 4 1 Total 12	Ongoing appropriate professional development is vital to improving reading instruction Inadequate funding for professional development IRA needs to help local and state councils learn how to provide programs that will attract today's reading educators
Reading Certification/ Licenses	11 Total 11	Reading certification is necessary and should be emphasized
Reading Needs of Specialized Populations	6 2 2 Total 10	Funding needed for professional development and materials Reading should be required in middle schools Full day kindergarten and early childhood need emphasis
State Governmental Affairs	3 3 2 1 Total 9	More attention should be given to state governmental affairs Teachers too busy to focus on state affairs IRA should help states support advocacy efforts State councils should work with other organizations
State Reading Issues	2 1 1 Total 4	State education units undergoing big changes IRA should find out state issues and share with all state councils State councils need to do more to help guide state actions
State Reading Standards and Tests	10 2 Total 12	Assessment should provide useful information about instructional needs Need assessment system should be connected to the new Common Core Standards

Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials	6 Total 6	Funding is inadequate
Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement	3 3 3 1 1 Total 11	Funding is inadequate Highly skilled reading teachers needed Professional development needed RTI is a big issue Extend Title I to middle grades
Technology	6 2 1 Total 9	Teachers should have the latest technology in their classrooms Technology given higher priority than basic reading Professional development needed to link technology with reading
Other Suggestions and Comments	2 2 2 2 2 1 1 1 1 Total 15	Develop a program to help parents support the reading of their children Increase promotion of IRA conferences and issues Provide more attention to adolescent struggling readers Provide webinars, videos, and online training for IRA members to get involved with government leaders Support the national standards Continue legislative workshops Continue to seek funding for Federal reading programs such as Reading First Increase attention to the problem of stagnant NAEP reading scores Prepare a publication on using technology Provide reading leadership to increase the expertise of classroom teachers in reading development and increase supply of reading specialists

Survey comments indicated the following:

Availability of Reading Instructional Materials: More funds are needed for reading instructional materials. Teachers need training on how to use supplementary reading materials and should have input on their selection.

Federal Legislation: Federal programs are not helpful. The national standards should be supported. Continue to seek funding for Federal reading programs and increase attention to the problem of stagnant NAEP reading scores.

Initial Preparation: Attention should be given to initial preparation of teachers. New teachers need mentors and reading leadership from principals.

Professional Development: Ongoing appropriate professional development is vital to improve reading instruction but there is need for more funding. Local and state councils need to provide programs that attract today's reading educators.

Reading Certification/Licenses: Reading certification is necessary and should be emphasized.

Reading Needs of Specialized Populations: Professional development and access to materials is needed. Reading in middle schools, full day kindergarten, and early childhood need emphasis.

State Governmental Affairs: More attention should be given to state governmental affairs despite reluctance of busy teachers to focus on state affairs. State organizations need help from IRA and also need to work with other organizations to gain state support.

State Reading Issues: Major changes are occurring in states. State councils need to know about reading issues in other states to help guide legislative actions. Provide training for IRA members to get involved with government leaders.

State Reading Standards and Tests: State assessments provide data but should also provide useful information concerning instruction. State assessments should be connected to the new Common Core Standards.

Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials: Funding is needed to provide new books for school libraries and classrooms.

Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement: Highly skilled reading teachers and continuing professional development is needed at all grade levels.

Technology: Teachers should have the latest technology in their classrooms and professional development to relate the technology to reading instruction. IRA should prepare a publication on using technology.

Most Important State Issues

Respondents listed 57 issues as shown in Table 4. The most frequently mentioned were assessment, funding, struggling readers, and certification.

Table 4. Most Important State Reading Issues

Number	Issue
11	Assessment
8	Funding for programs
8	Struggling readers
7	Certification
5	Adolescent reading
5	Professional Development
3	English Language Learners
3	RTI
2	Comprehension, fluency, vocabulary
2	New core curriculum standards
1	State leadership
1	Teacher resources
1	Urban literacy
Total 57	

Table 5 lists ways in which the International Reading Association could help state council legislative efforts. IRA should provide resources for professional development such as speakers, webinars, articles, RTI, conferences, and white papers. Help is needed for state and local councils in how to deal with legislators, state boards of education, local school boards in areas such as testing and how to advocate for reading legislation, including reading certification. Federal and state funding for reading and school libraries should be sought.

Table 5. How the International Reading Association Can Be of Help

Number	Ways to Help
17	Provide resources for professional development
8	Support legislative efforts of state councils
7	Continue to seek Federal funding for reading
4	Encourage IRA members to advocate for reading legislation
4	Lobby for more funding for reading and school libraries
4	Promote reading certification
4	Reduce testing
1	Continue research in effective teaching of reading
1	Promote adolescent literacy
Total 50	

Results, Conclusions, and Legislative Implications

Respondents marked 63.4 percent of their responses as high priority, 31.5 percent as average priority, and 5 percent low priority. Professional development and federal legislation were ranked as the highest priority areas. The 2007 survey ranked state reading standards and tests ranked first but they ranked much lower in 2010. Federal legislation had a high rank on both surveys.

The areas are listed below in priority rank for all respondents with the most frequent comments concerning each area.

- 1. Professional Development.** Ongoing appropriate professional development is vital to improve reading instruction but there is need for more funding. Local and state councils need to provide programs that attract today's reading educators.
- 2. Federal Legislation:** Federal programs are not helpful. The national standards should be supported. Continue to seek funding for Federal reading programs and increase attention to the problem of stagnant NAEP reading scores.
- 3. Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement:** Highly skilled reading teachers and continuing professional development are needed at all grade levels.
- 4. Initial Preparation:** Attention should be given to initial preparation of teachers. New teachers need mentors and reading leadership from principals.
- 5. Reading Needs of Specialized Populations:** Professional development and access to materials is needed. Reading in middle schools, full day kindergarten, and early childhood need emphasis.
- 6. Availability of Reading Instructional Materials:** More funds are needed for reading instructional materials. Teachers need training on how to use supplementary reading materials and should have input on their selection.
- 7. Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials:** Funding is needed to provide new books for school libraries and classrooms.
- 8. State Reading Standards and Tests:** State assessments provide data but should also provide useful information concerning instruction. State assessments should be connected to the new Common Core Standards.
- 9. Reading Certification/Licenses:** Reading certification is necessary and should be emphasized.
- 10. Technology:** Teachers should have the latest technology in their classrooms and professional development to relate the technology to reading instruction. IRA should prepare a publication on using technology.

11. State Reading Issues: Major changes are occurring in states. State councils need to know about reading issues in other states to help guide legislative actions. Provide training for IRA members to get involved with government leaders.

12. State Governmental Affairs: More attention should be given to state governmental affairs despite reluctance of busy teachers to focus on state affairs. State organizations need help from IRA and also need to work with other organizations to gain state support.

How the IRA Can Help State Councils

The most frequently mentioned suggestions of ways that the IRA can be of help to states councils are by:

- Providing resources for professional development such as speakers, webinars, articles, RTI conferences, and white papers.
- Supporting legislative efforts of state councils
- Seeking appropriate Federal funding for reading and school libraries
- Encouraging IRA members to advocate for reading legislation
- Helping local and state councils increase advocacy for reading

Legislative Implications

Availability of Reading Instructional Materials. State councils should support legislation to make appropriate reading instructional materials available to all schools.

Federal Legislation. IRA should continue to seek funding for appropriate Federal reading programs. National standards should be supported.

Initial Preparation. More attention should be given to the initial preparation of teachers, both in higher education and with mentors and principal leadership in schools.

Reading Certification/Licenses. IRA should promote the use of trained reading teachers for work in federal reading programs. State councils should be aware of reading certification/License programs in other states and advocate what is best for their states.

Reading Needs of Specialized Populations. State councils should focus on the reading needs of all specialized populations using IRA materials for professional development. Reading in middle schools, full day kindergarten, and early childhood need emphasis.

State Governmental Affairs. State councils should continue to provide advocacy awards and use IRA recommendations for working with state governments including lobbying legislators, working with other organizations, and keeping members informed through meetings, newsletters, and Web pages.

State Reading Issues. The IRA should continue to provide position papers and other information about state reading issues in various states and provide training for IRA members to get involved with government leaders.

State Reading Standards and Tests. IRA and state councils should work to ensure that state assessments provide data that helps reading teachers with instruction. IRA and state councils should seek to connect state assessments with the new common Core Standards.

Sufficient Funding for Current Books and Other Print Materials. IRA and state councils should work with school library organizations to promote the need for current books and other print materials for school libraries and publicize the need for current materials in classrooms.

Support for Students Reading Well Below Their Grade Placement. IRA and state councils should promote the need for skilled reading teachers to provide reading instruction for struggling readers. IRA and state councils should seek funding for reading teachers to provide instruction for struggling readers beyond elementary schools.

Technology. IRA should promote the need for reading teachers to have access to the latest technology in their classrooms and professional development on using the technology. IRA should prepare a publication on using technology in reading classes.