Review of the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 90.1313
Research and Service Center: Teacher Education and Professional Development, Specific Subject Areas

The Center for Reading and Literacy at Illinois State University was approved by the Illinois Board of Higher Education as a state-recognized research and service center on October 2, 2001. In 2008 Jean Borg endowed the center, which was subsequently renamed the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy in honor of Jean Borg’s mother and Jean Borg’s gifts to the Illinois State University Foundation. Jean Borg graduated from Illinois State Normal University in 1950 and subsequently taught junior high school science, served as a school counselor, and served as a faculty member in curriculum and instruction at the University of South Florida. The Borg Center is housed in the School of Teaching and Learning within the College of Education. This is the second review of the center.

The Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy (the Borg Center) has four primary objectives or goals: to provide services to policymakers in the areas of reading and literacy, to provide services to the state of Illinois in the areas of reading and literacy, to provide services to professional educators in the areas of reading and literacy, and to support research among university faculty, university students, and members of the wider research community to broaden the understanding of reading, literacy, and literacy education. These objectives align with the mission of Illinois State in that they provide opportunities to serve university students, children in central Illinois who struggle with reading, and educators who desire to improve their instruction in reading and literacy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The self-study process for the Borg Center was comprised of five components: review of center documents and processes, including surveys of parents and tutors participating in the tutoring program sponsored by the center; review of center projects, fiscal reports, and plans for new initiatives; completion of an audit in August 2015 by the Office of Internal Auditing at the University; review of research progress reports provided by faculty members who received research funds from the center; and analysis of evaluative data and feedback from the professional development projects implemented by the center since the last center review. The self-study process was led by the center director, who also compiled the self-study report.

Assessment. Borg Center initiatives assessed to determine the success of the center include pursuing and writing research or service grants with the goal of programmatic and financial self-sufficiency of the center; expanding the work of the center as a professional development resource for schools and districts throughout Illinois; increasing visibility of the center on the state, regional, and national levels by pursuing new partnerships and professional opportunities; and improving fiscal accountability and operational efficiency of the center. Assessment of center initiatives includes formative and summative components. Formative components include monthly meetings of the center director and the director of the America Reads initiative in fall, spring, and summer to review work of the tutoring partnership and its development, and progress reports submitted by faculty members receiving research support from the center. For a summative assessment the center director writes an annual report describing activities, expenditures, and outcomes of the center during the prior fiscal year and shares the report with the school director, college dean, and the center advisory board.

Accomplishments. Major accomplishments of the Borg Center since the 2011 center review include revival of the tutoring program, which has been the core initiative of the center since its inception in 2001; professional development work in the Litchfield and Leroy school districts; submission of an external grant application to support a reading and literacy research partnership with the Wheeling school district; development of a partnership with the new Teacher Quality Partnership grant in the College of Education at Illinois State; and creation of the Borg Fellows Program.
Since 2001 the tutoring program sponsored by the Borg Center has provided opportunities for children in the Bloomington-Normal area to receive help developing their reading skills and opportunities for teacher preparation students at Illinois State to gain professional practice experience by tutoring the children. Since the last center review the number of students tutored through the program declined from a high of 26 to a low of 8 in 2015, and the number of tutors declined from a high of 15 to a low of 4 in 2015. The center attributed the decline to competition from new tutoring services in the community and to depletion of tutoring scholarships that had been offered by the center. In 2015 the Borg Center embarked on a new era in its long-standing tutoring program through a partnership with the America Reads program. America Reads is an initiative of the United States Department of Education through which college students participating in the federal work study program tutor children from kindergarten through ninth grade in reading and literacy. In the first semester of the Borg Center tutoring program since partnering with America Reads, the number of Illinois State students tutoring in the program increased to 32 and the number of tutoring sites increased to 13, including public and parochial schools.

Professional development services provided by the Borg Center include an elementary literacy curriculum audit conducted in 2013 for Litchfield Community Unit School District 12. This was a collaborative effort involving the Borg Center, the Center for the Study of Educational Policy at Illinois State, and the National Board Resource Center at Illinois State. The audit focused on curricula of three elementary schools in the district. Another professional development program presented by the center since 2011 was a balanced literacy workshop for teachers in Leroy Community Unit School District 2 and surrounding school districts. The workshop was attended by 25 educators; feedback from participants was positive.

In 2015 the Borg Center collaborated with Wheeling Community Consolidated School District 21 to submit a grant application to the Institute of Education Sciences, the statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the United States Department of Education. The application requested nearly $400,000 to develop an evidence-based framework to better link an early literacy intervention program to student achievement, curricular goals, and community resources. The application was not funded, but the center has since organized a new consortium of school districts to revise the grant for resubmission.

The Borg Center has partnered with the College of Education and its Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline on a new Teacher Quality Partnership grant to develop an integrated comprehensive system of urban teacher recruitment, preparation, induction, and mentoring. The Borg Center contribution to the project is providing expertise in literacy professional development for school districts in Peoria and Decatur.

In 2014-2015 the Borg Center piloted its Borg Fellows Program, through which the center offers financial support for research in reading and literacy conducted by faculty or students at Illinois State. In its first year the program supported four research projects at $500 each, including one project conducted collaboratively with a doctoral student in the School of Teaching and Learning.

Resources. The Borg Center is funded through an annual contribution from the College of Education and from revenue generated by professional development and tutoring services offered by the center. While an endowment for the center has been established by Jean Borg, the center does not yet have complete access to endowment funds. Borg Center faculty and staff include the director, who receives a one-course teaching load reduction from the School of Teaching and Learning and additional salary during the summer term to run the center, a graduate assistant funded by the center, a part-time staff member who provides consulting services to schools and school districts, and services of School of Teaching and Learning administrative staff.

Response to previous program review recommendations. Three recommendations by the Academic Planning Committee resulted from the 2011-2012 review of the Borg Center. The Academic Planning Committee recommended that the center work with University Assessment Services to identify ways to evaluate the quality, impact, and effectiveness of programs and services provided by the center, in part to ensure their alignment with university and community needs. The center has partially addressed the recommendation by identifying initiatives it will assess to evaluate center performance and by developing formative and summative assessment strategies. The center now needs to consult with University Assessment Services to incorporate these and other elements of assessment into a comprehensive assessment plan. The Academic Planning Committee recommended that the center increase the number of grant requests submitted to external funding entities. Since the last review the Borg Center has collaborated with Wheeling Community Consolidated School District 21 to submit a grant application to the
Institute of Education Sciences Fiscal 2015 competition for researcher-practitioner partnerships. The Academic Planning Committee recommended that the Borg Center enhance the reputation of the center through continuation of its exemplary programs and services at the local, state, and regional levels. Since the last review the center has worked to expand its presence in the community by reviving its long-standing tutoring program. On the regional level the center has provided professional development services for school districts in Leroy and Litchfield.

**Major findings of this self-study.** The Borg Center concludes from its self-study that the center has been able to expand its impact on struggling readers since the last center review, by forming a new partnership with America Reads to revive and expand its tutoring program, by expanding support for quality faculty scholarship through the Borg Fellows Program, and by increasing center capacity to provide professional development and consulting services by hiring a part-time educational consultant. While progress has been made in developing assessment goals and strategies for the center, additional work is needed in the coming years to further develop and formalize the center assessment plan.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** Based on findings of this center review, the Borg Center has identified the following initiatives for the next review cycle: submit applications for external funds to support programs and services of the center, including applications to federal entities such as the Institute of Education Sciences and applications to private foundations such as the Spencer Foundation; continue to collaborate with the Center for the Study of Educational Policy at Illinois State on initiatives of mutual interest; expand professional development services in reading and literacy for teachers and administrators in school districts throughout the state; continue to support the tutoring services partnership with America Reads; and seek opportunities to provide reading and literacy services to other community agencies such as the Western Avenue Community Center in Bloomington.

**PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy (Borg Center) to be in **Good Standing.**

The Academic Planning Committee commends the Borg Center for its efforts to provide reading and literacy services to area youth, professional practice experiences in reading and literacy for teacher education students at Illinois State, literacy audits and professional development opportunities for school districts, and support for reading and literacy research at the University.

The committee acknowledges efforts by the center to reverse recent declines in the number of students participating in the Borg Center Tutoring Program, a core initiative of the center since its inception in 2001. The partnership established by the center with the federal America Reads Program in summer 2015 appears to have reversed that trend; the number of undergraduate students participating as tutors increased from 4 immediately prior to establishment of the partnership to 32 by fall 2015, and the number of area tutoring sites increased from 4 to 13.

The committee commends the center for establishing the Borg Fellows Program, which provides financial support to faculty members at the University conducting research in reading and literacy. In its first year (2014-2015) the program funded four projects, including research on books used to teach science to emergent bilinguals, integration of technology in the eighth grade language arts classroom, and a multi-literacies approach to literature in secondary language arts. One of the four projects involved collaboration between a faculty member and a doctoral student.

The 2011-2012 center review encouraged the Borg Center to seek external funding to support programs and services of the center. Since then the center has submitted an application to the Institute of Education Sciences and has sought partnerships with the Center for the Study of Educational Policy and the Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline. Both are initiatives of the College of Education and recipients of external grants to support policy initiatives and direct services. The committee recognizes the Borg Center for these development efforts.

Providing services to policymakers and to the state of Illinois are among the four primary objectives or goals of the Borg Center. While the center continues to promote reading and literacy locally and regionally, the committee is concerned about progress being made by the center toward contributing to the advancement of reading and literacy.
on the state level. The committee recognizes that, at current funding levels, the ability of the center to engage in broader policy issues regarding reading and literacy and to contribute to shaping such policies on the state and national levels is limited. According to the self-study report, support for the center director is provided primarily through a course release each fall and spring semester. Assisting the director are a consultant hired as civil service extra help and one graduate assistant paid for by the center rather than by the University.

The committee asks the center director to enter into discussions with its stakeholders, including the School of Teaching and Learning and the College of Education, regarding the level of financial support necessary for the center to advance its goals, particularly its goal of serving the state of Illinois, and potential sources of that financial support. The committee asks the center to summarize these discussions and the recommendations resulting from them in a report submitted to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2017. Through these discussions the committee asks center stakeholders to consider future support for the Borg Center relative to support for other centers, both existing and proposed, administered through units of the College of Education. Options stakeholders might consider include, but are not limited to, allocation of additional resources to the Borg Center by the college, fostering additional funding partnerships with other centers in the college, continuing operation of the center at its current level but as a non-IBHE recognized institute, or disestablishing the center and having its services provided by faculty members as part of their annual research and service assignments.

**Recommendations**

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next center review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2019, the committee asks the center to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The committee reiterates the recommendation resulting from the 2011-2012 review that the center develop and implement an assessment plan. It is likely that elements of an effective assessment plan are already in place and are being implemented, so the primary effort in formalizing an assessment plan will involve integrating those elements into a cohesive strategy. Assistance in developing the assessment plan is available from University Assessment Services.

- An important characteristic of all research and service centers at Illinois State is support for student learning at the University. The committee encourages the center to continue providing professional practice opportunities in reading and literacy for pre-service teachers at the University and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to collaborate with faculty on reading and literacy research.

- The committee recommends that the center continue to seek external funds for its ongoing reading and literacy initiatives such as tutoring, consultations with school districts, and research. The committee recommends that the committee continue to explore collaborations with other initiatives of the College of Education that might involve the center serving as a sub-grantee on grant-funded projects.

- Most Borg Center initiatives have focused on reading and literacy on the K-8 level either through direct services to elementary school students or through professional development opportunities for the teachers and administrators who educate them. The committee commends these initiatives as providing much-needed support for improving reading and literacy among children in our community and region. The committee notes the additional need to support reading and literacy for students beyond the elementary level, including students in secondary schools and even post-secondary schools. The center may want to explore ways to address reading and literacy needs throughout the K-16 grade span, perhaps exploring external funding that may be available to support that broader population. The center might consider assisting with literacy education for college students at Illinois State in secondary teacher education programs as well as Illinois State students themselves who struggle with the transition from reading on the high school level to reading on the college level.