

IRC
ILLINOIS
READING
COUNCIL

C *ommunicator*

Volume 36, Number 4

May 2013

In This Issue:

BOARD BRIEFS

President's Column	1
IRA State Coordinator	2-3

IRC ACTIVITIES

2013 Awards and Grants	4-5
Awards at IRA Convention	5
2013 IRC Conference	6
2013 Hall of Fame	13
2014 IRC Conference	20

FORMS

2014 Program Proposal for IRC Conference ..	10-12
Illinois Reads Marketplace	15

FEATURES

Hungry for Reading!	7
Illinois Reads	7
National Book Festival	8
Rtl Book Review	9
SRL's 37th Day of Reading ..	9
Meet an IRC Researcher	14
Newspapers in Education	16
Reading Comprehension	17
Author Visits	17
Cool Studies	18-19

2014 IRC Conference
March 13-15, 2014



BUILDING BRIDGES
to Literacy

Registration and Housing
will be available in October.

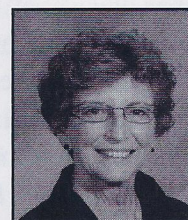
We never know whether March will come in like a lion or a lamb, but we DO know that, regardless of the weather, the Illinois Reading Council's annual conference comes in like a blast of fresh air and leaves us with a flurry of ideas, connections, motivation and resolve. The 2013 IRC Conference, *Literacy for Life*, was no exception. Authors

shared their stories, inspirations, and writing processes. Academics shared their research and professional methods, while teachers and librarians shared their practical applications. Hotel and convention staff made the Springfield experience feel like a homecoming. Hellos and hugs were abundant and a bit of sadness came over everyone as the events culminated.

Monday's students across the state and beyond Illinois borders benefited from their teachers' Springfield experience. Educators, filled with enthusiasm and new methods and materials, shared with sleepy Monday morning learners. Teachers woke up their kids and colleagues with their renewed resolve to bring literacy to life this spring.

That is what the Illinois Reading Council is all about all year long. Stay connected, apply the new ideas, and use the new materials. Put the 2014 IRC Conference, *Building Bridges to Literacy*, on your calendar and, while you anticipate next year's conference, be sure to attend local and special interest council events, read the *IRC Journal* and the *IRC Communicator*, and check out the IRC web site.

Keep Illinois Reads (www.illinoisreads.org) in mind as you enjoy the spring that has finally arrived and the summer to come.



IRC
President
Pat Braun

Meet an IRC Researcher

By Elizabeth Goldsmith-Conley, Studies and Research Committee Chair



As part of its ongoing, "Meet an IRC Researcher Series," the Studies and Research Committee is delighted to present one of its own members, Karen Walker, who is doing important work explicitly aimed at improving literacy practices in our schools. Last spring as a doctoral student at National Louis University, Karen completed a special type of dissertation which has great

value for any schools interested in implementing a truly successful school wide independent reading program.

Unlike the typical research dissertation, Karen's project, *Improving Literacy Achievement through Independent Student Reading: advocating a policy to increase independent student reading among adolescents*, follows the policy advocacy model. This is a model which is being used in doctoral programs at Harvard, Vanderbilt, and the University of Southern California and which has gained credibility and attention in recent years. As Karen explains, the model evolves from school reform initiatives and agendas and has a less theoretical and more practical goal of developing reflective practices in administration.

Karen's commitment to a project that focuses on promoting concrete educational reform is not surprising in that she comes to academia after having spent 3 years at Designs for Change. Designs for Change (DFC) is a nonprofit advocacy organization that describes itself as seeking to change urban education on "a scale that matters by linking research and reform." The mission of DFC, which was begun in 1977, "is to improve the nation's 50 largest urban public school systems, beginning in Chicago." Karen's interest in working with DFC on reforming urban education grows out of the seven years she spent teaching in the Chicago Public School system.

After her detailed investigation of ten schools in a suburban school district in Illinois which required interviews with the multiple stakeholders, administrators, teachers, parents, board members, Karen emerged with a set of ten recommendations that have general validity for most other districts. Although the district had made a commitment to instituting a district

wide independent reading program and had invested a significant amount of money in classroom libraries, Karen's investigation showed they were weak in most of the necessary implementation components. Just providing classrooms with books and setting aside a time when students are told to read will not result in an effective program with visible benefits. Part of her research required her to develop a step by step two year professional development plan that would be necessary to develop the ten components she had determined were crucial to implementation. These components include the following:

1. An effective classroom library needs careful organization. Presenting students with a jumble of books is not effective.
2. Books need to be leveled so students can easily select books that are at their independent reading level. Students need to be taught how to select books on their own that will be just right for them, neither too easy nor too hard.
3. Teachers need to administer reading interest surveys so they can guide students to books with content that will be of interest to them.
4. Students need to have the opportunity to respond to their reading either in writing or discussion.
5. Students need to be taught to apply comprehension strategies to their independent reading.
6. During reading time teachers should be conferencing rather than doing chores.
7. Students need to set individual goals, perhaps through acts that will give them a purpose for reading and will provide an additional means of engagement
8. Students need to be given some sort of formal recognition for meeting the independent reading goals they have set for themselves.

For each of these steps, Karen has developed instructional materials. She invites anyone who wants further information to email her at connectiontokpw@aol.com.

We want to congratulate Karen not only on earning her doctorate, completing a dissertation which provides a practical guide for those of us interested in creating effective school wide independent reading time, and being willing to send us her handouts, but also for having just moved from being an adjunct lecturer at National Louis University to being a full-time, tenure track assistant professor at Rockford College in the fall.