



# ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY  
OF WYOMING

College of Education  
Literacy Research  
Center and Clinic



# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Literacy,

At the end of the academic year, it is a valued tradition to reflect on the journey we've undertaken—and what a fulfilling and exhilarating year it has been. I am delighted to share that I am now executive director of the Literacy Research Center and Clinic (LRCC). After serving as interim director for the past two years, I am well-acquainted with the responsibilities of the role, and I am deeply honored to step into this position permanently. It is a privilege to work alongside such remarkable colleagues, whom I not only respect as scholars but also cherish as dear friends. This is truly a wonderful place to come to work each day.



Our commitment to professional development and literacy needs assessments across Wyoming remains unwavering. In this role, I have had the pleasure of collaborating with many outstanding educators, administrators, students, and families. As a Wyoming native, I am reminded time and again of how deeply we care for our communities. We take pride in our schools, value our teachers, support our students, and hold education in the highest regard. The dedication and hard work of educators in our state continue to inspire me, and I am fortunate to work and learn alongside them.

The LRCC is incredibly fortunate to have generous donors who consistently support our mission—to teach and research how Wyoming students think with, acquire knowledge from, engage with, and produce a variety of texts as well as how teachers and administrators facilitate these processes. By enhancing students' abilities to process and produce texts and by equipping teachers to better support their students, we aim to help students achieve personal, economic, and social fulfillment—ultimately improving the quality of life for students, their families, and their communities. We are profoundly grateful for our donors' dedication to empowering literacy in our schools.

I am filled with anticipation for the opportunities that lie ahead. The LRCC will continue to collaborate closely with schools, the Wyoming Department of Education, and other educational partners across the state to provide and participate in meaningful professional learning opportunities.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly Gustafson', written in a cursive style.

Kimberly Gustafson, Ed.D.  
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University of Wyoming College of Education  
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# LITERACY RESEARCH CENTER AND CLINIC

## OUR VISION

Empowering literacy through evidence-based practices.

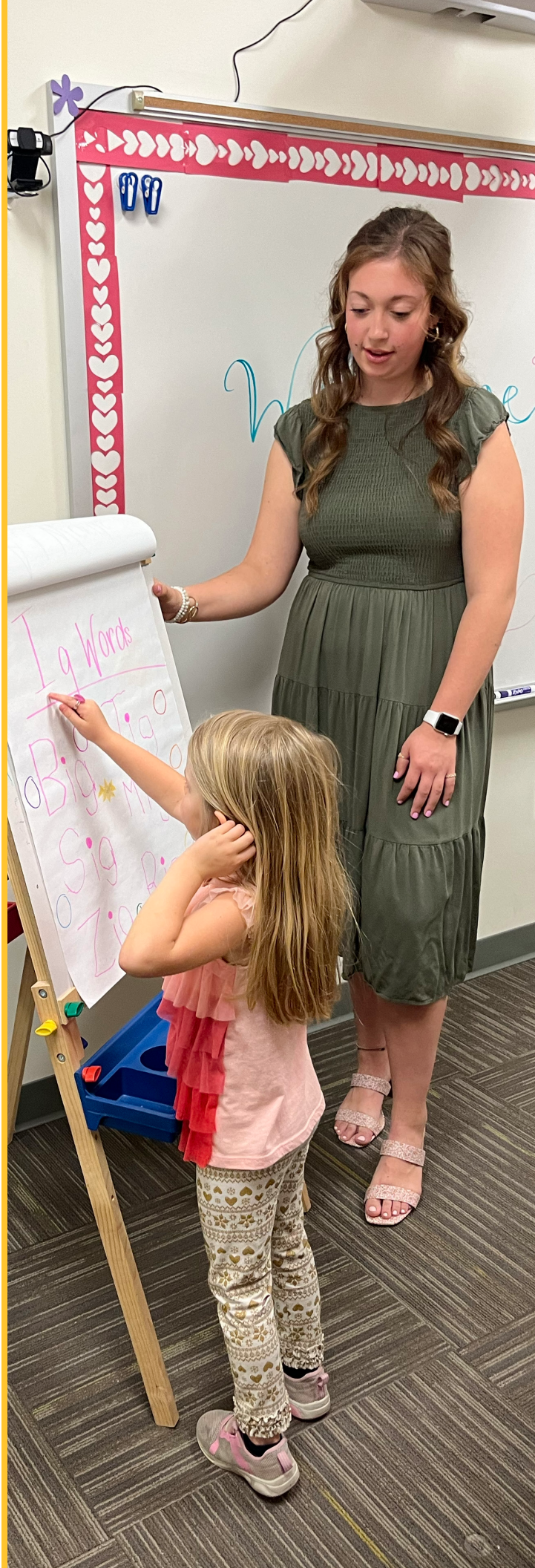
## OUR MISSION

Teaching and researching how Wyoming students think with, acquire knowledge from, engage with, and produce a variety of texts as well as how teachers facilitate these processes. When students can more effectively process and produce texts and teachers can support students' abilities, then students are more likely to achieve personal, economic, and social fulfillment, which improves quality of life for students, their families, and their communities.

## OUR VALUES

Literacy is achieved through the following values.

- **RESEARCH:** Rigorous research evidence applied in instruction to support students' comprehension and production of text.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Collaboration and shared responsibility for students' comprehension and production of text among researchers, educators, parents, students, and the community.
- **EMPOWERMENT:** A demonstrable impact on Wyoming teachers' knowledge and skill of effective literacy instruction and on student learning.
- **EQUITY:** Instructional decisions that ensure equitable opportunities for all students to engage in active informed citizenship and succeed in a sustainable global economy.



# THE LITERACY TUTORING CLINIC

The Literacy Research Center and Clinic conducted two tutoring sessions during the 2023-24 school year. Our spring semester was one of the most productive literacy clinics we've had in recent times. We served 13 students from grade levels pre-K to grade 7. These students were taught by 11 tutors, and most of these tutors were undergraduates studying at the College of Education. These undergraduate tutors were recruited through advertisements, class visits, and recommendations of academic staff teaching undergraduate classes at the College of Education. In this regard, the tutoring sessions provided valuable means of mentoring the undergraduates to be effective educators while serving the literacy needs of the Wyoming community.

All tutors are mentored by Distinguished Teacher in Residence Sara Pommarane and LRCC doctoral student Thilina Wickramaarachci. The mentoring sessions included working with undergraduates to guide them through literacy pre-assessments and individualized lesson planning and adjusting their teaching as the need arose. The mentors also have the capability to observe tutoring sessions to provide timely feedback to move both the students and the tutors forward. The mentors and tutors work together to arrive at solutions for the literacy-related challenges of the students.

At the end of the semester, tutors developed summary reports focusing on the results of the assessments. These include a range of assessments related to word recognition, passage reading, spelling, and writing. The summary report also included a description of student strengths and needs and recommendations for home and school reinforcement. These summary reports were shared with caregivers so they could encourage the students to continue to engage in literacy-related activities during summer.

The spring 2024 tutoring cycle concluded with a celebration of student work and literacy-related projects that the students worked on with their tutors throughout the semester. There was a large gathering of parents, students, tutors, and LRCC staff at the event, and students appreciated the opportunities to share their work and to celebrate what they learned at the clinic.



# ENDOWED CHAIRS

## DR. LESLIE RUSH

### OUTREACH/ENGAGEMENT WORK TO WYOMING SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION AGENCIES

A substantial portion of Dr. Rush's work is engaging in literacy support for Wyoming school districts and other agencies. During the 2023-24 academic year, Dr. Rush engaged in the following professional development activities that are designed to build Wyoming teacher and administrator expertise in adolescent literacy.

- **Sublette County School District 1** – Pinedale. Dr. Rush provided 6 hours of professional development per month throughout the 2023-24 academic year. This work focused on vocabulary instruction improvement with all middle and high school teachers in Pinedale.
- **Teton County School District 1** – Jackson. Dr. Rush served as a consultant with the district's literacy leadership team to support system-wide improvement of literacy outcomes for multilingual learners. This involved biweekly planning meetings and support at monthly meetings of the entire district team.
- **Big Horn County School District 1** – Burlington and Cowley. Dr. Rush provided 4 hours of professional development per month throughout the 2023-24 academic year. This work focused on vocabulary instruction improvement with 15 middle and high school teachers and administrators in Burlington and Cowley.

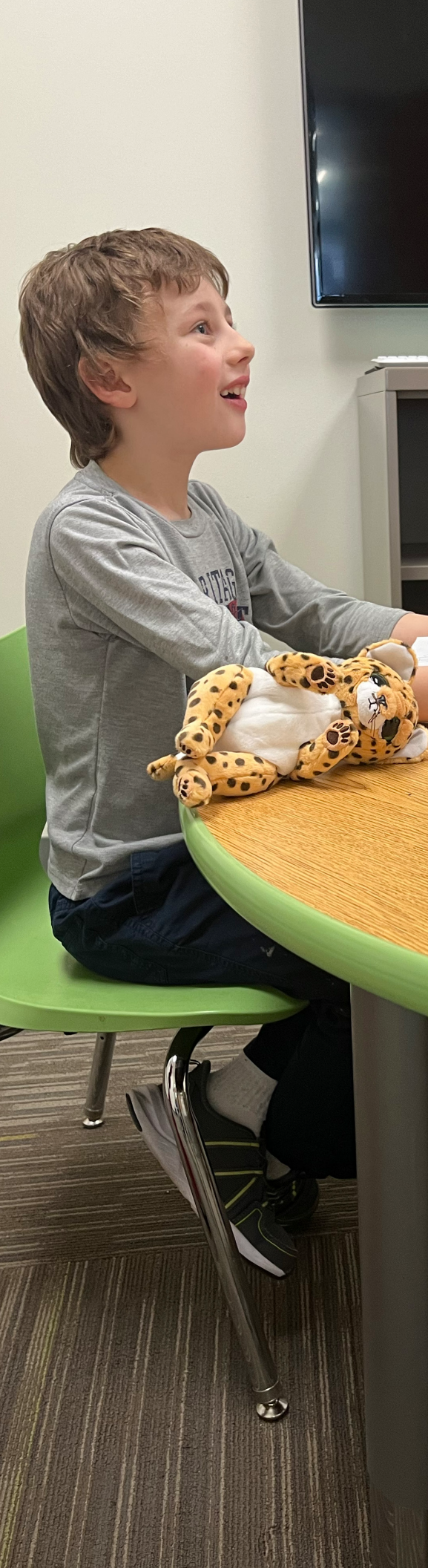


As an integral part of the service provided to Wyoming by the Literacy Research Center and Clinic, Dr. Rush participated in literacy-focused district-wide data collection and analysis for needs assessments in Fremont County School District #1, Platte County School District #1, and Big Horn County School District #4.

In addition to the above ongoing work throughout the school year, Dr. Rush made several presentations with organizations and conferences within Wyoming:

- the Wyoming Association of School Administrators (WASA),
- the Wyoming Department of Education's Literacy Webinar Series,
- the Big Horn County School District #1 (Basin) District Professional Development Day,
- the Wyoming Department of Education's Embracing Literacy Conference, and
- the Wyoming State Board of Education.





## LEADERSHIP FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR WYOMING EDUCATORS

The School of Teacher Education provides several academic graduate programs that support ongoing learning and improvement for Wyoming classroom teachers. In this regard, Dr. Rush serves as the program coordinator for the Literacy Graduate Certificate program. This program is designed for practicing classroom teachers and provides eligibility for teachers to add an endorsement in reading to their existing initial teaching license through the Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board. Current enrollment in the Literacy Graduate Certificate program is 35, and Dr. Rush serves as the advisor for all students.

Dr. Rush also serves as the program coordinator for the master's in Education and Literacy Education program. This distance program, which began admitting students in summer 2022, is designed for practicing classroom teachers. Coursework overlaps with and builds on the knowledge base in the Literacy Graduate Certificate program. Current enrollment in this program is 13, with new students applying on a regular basis.

## RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND SERVICE

Dr. Rush also contributes to Wyoming educators through her involvement on several ongoing projects, including the Trustees Education Initiatives's Wyoming Teacher Mentor Corps, the Wallop Curriculum Project, and the Wyoming Transitions Program, an initiative funded by the Ellbogen Foundation to collect information on Wyoming high school programs designed to support students for postsecondary success.

Dr. Rush also published two book chapters during the 2023-24 academic year and an article in the widely read Phi Delta Kappan. Dr. Rush has two manuscripts currently under review with *Educational Policy* and *Teachers and Teaching*. In addition, Dr. Rush has taken the lead on a proposal for an edited book with colleagues Cynthia Brock and Todd Reynolds titled *From Wyoming to the World: Innovative Approaches to Literacy in Rural Contexts*, which is currently under review with Routledge. The chapter authors for the edited book are all Wyoming educators, and the audience is made up of educators in U.S. rural schools.

Dr. Rush continues to actively present at national and local conferences, including the Wyoming Department of Education's Embracing Literacy Conference, the Literacy Research Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English.



## **DR. CYNTHIA BROCK**

### **OUTREACH/ENGAGEMENT WORK TO WYOMING SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION AGENCIES**

Across the 2023 calendar year, Dr. Brock worked with Dr. Kim Gustafson (executive director, LRCC), Sara Pommarane (distinguished teacher in residence, LRCC), and Dr. Leslie Rush (adolescent literacy endowed chair, LRCC) to develop and maintain collaborative research and professional literacy learning partnerships in schools in Teton #1, Fremont #6 and #38, and Albany #1. The Literacy Research Center and Clinic team works with more Wyoming schools and districts, but the districts listed are the ones with which Dr. Brock was directly involved.



### **LEADERSHIP FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR WYOMING EDUCATORS**

Working in conjunction with Dr. Ana Houseal, Dr. Brock and her colleagues successfully implemented the seventh year of the College of Education Academic Writing Fellows Initiative. Dr. Brock also chaired two College of Education search committees—executive director and adolescent literacy endowed chair. She chaired a Curriculum and Instruction Task Force focused on graduate education in the College of Education.

In addition to providing service to the UW College of Education, Dr. Brock provides service at the state and national levels. For example, Dr. Brock is a member of the Wyoming Department of Education English Language Arts Standards Revision Committee. Working collaboratively with LRCC colleagues, Dr. Brock helped to organize and run the 2023 Annual LRCC Literacy Conference. Dr. Brock presented to the Wyoming State Board of Education, and she presented at the WDE Literacy Leaders Coaching Conference. She co-presented at the WDE Literacy Conference and the Wyoming Association of School Administrators Conference, and she collaborated with LRCC and WDE colleagues to create a Literacy Improvement Networking Collaborative that involves planning and engaging in statewide book clubs and co-presenting webinars for the WDE.

Dr. Brock is leading the K-3 American Indian Education for All Disciplinary Literacy Initiative, along with Rob Black and Lori Pusateri-Lane (WDE), the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Business Councils, Dr. Kim Gustafson (UW), Dr. Jayne Hellenberg (UW), and Dr. Pauline Harris (the University of South Australia).

## RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND SERVICE

At the national level, Dr. Brock served on the Literacy Research Association Publications Committee, and she began her tenure as vice president elect and then vice president of the Literacy Research Association, which 'is the premier literacy research organization in the U.S. Dr. Brock completed four external reviews for colleagues in the field of literacy seeking promotion from assistant to associate or associate to full professor of literacy at the following institutions: Arizona State University, the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, Boston University, and Old Dominion University. Dr. Brock helped to sponsor a UW literacy doctoral student to attend the 2023 Literacy Research Association Conference.

Dr. Brock co-wrote and submitted a Spencer Large Grant with four colleagues—two in Australia, one in New Zealand, and one in the U.K. This grant was unfunded, but it moved forward into a finalist round of 20 candidates from over 300 applications. Dr. Brock co-wrote a book for Lexington Press, and she co-edited an international handbook for Routledge. As well, she co-authored four refereed journal articles, and she co-wrote six book chapters.

# THE DISTINGUISHED TEACHER IN RESIDENCE

## SARA POMMARANE

Over the past school year, Sara Pommarane had the honor of serving as the distinguished teacher in residence. This role, which is brand new to the LRCC, allowed her to work as a mentor to undergraduates, to collaborate with school districts across the state, and to teach at the university level.

The LRCC provides tutoring services to students in Albany County that spans grades K-12. Sara worked closely with doctoral student Thilina Wickramaarchchi to mentor undergraduate tutors who assist local children. Together, Sara and Thilina designed individualized instruction for each student and supported the tutors in their roles. Drawing from her experiences as a mentor-teacher throughout her career in Albany County, Sara was able to share valuable insights and practices with these future educators. Mentoring upcoming teachers is a passion of Sara's, and it has been deeply fulfilling to her to contribute to their professional growth.



Another significant aspect of Sara's role was collaborating with schools across the state. Sara continued her work with Wind River and Arapahoe elementary schools, where she has been involved for several years. This included providing specialized professional development, modeling lessons, conducting information sessions, and planning alongside teachers. Additionally, Sara worked with secondary teachers in Burlington and Cowley to enhance their content vocabulary, and she participated in conducting literacy needs assessments in Lander and Wheatland. The LRCC's approach emphasizes meeting schools where they are and adapting to their specific needs, so Sara's professional development efforts were tailored to each school's unique context.

Sara also had the privilege of teaching a sophomore-level course for the College of Education that covered all areas of literacy. This opportunity allowed her to integrate her classroom experiences, National Board Certification specialty, and ongoing work towards her Literacy Endorsement from the University of Wyoming into the curriculum for future teachers.

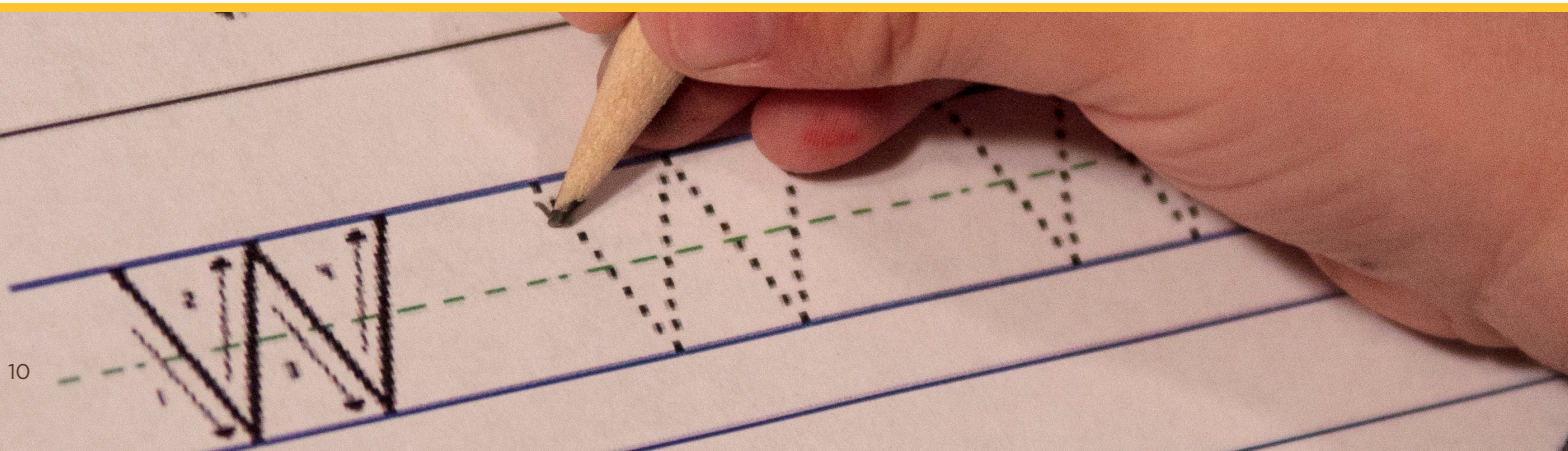
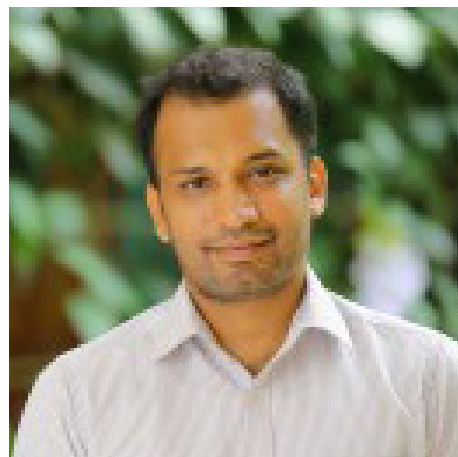
Reflecting on the past year, Sara's role as distinguished teacher in residence has been both fulfilling and challenging. It has been a rewarding experience for her to contribute to the important work done by the Literacy Research Center and Clinic, which impacts districts, schools, teachers, and students across the state of Wyoming.

## THE GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT

### THILINA WICKRAMAARACHCHI

Thilina Wickramaarachchi is a graduate research assistant at the LRCC and is currently in his fourth year of Ph.D. studies in literacy education. He actively participates in research projects conducted by the LRCC and contributes to the work at the literacy clinic. Some of the highlights of Thilina's work in 2024 were co-teaching an undergraduate course, contributing to the literacy clinic, coordinating three online courses, and presenting at an international conference in Finland.

The course, EDEL 2140 or Teaching Literacy in the Elementary School, that Thilina co-taught with Dr. Kimberly Gustafson provided him with valuable experience in teaching and assessing undergraduate students at the University of Wyoming. For his work at the literacy clinic, Thilina mentored undergraduate tutors and offered insights and suggestions to improve their teaching. Thilina also coordinated three courses—Literacy Leadership I and II and Introduction to Dyslexia—that are offered online through WyoLearn. For his research, Thilina worked on a project titled "Using Tenets of Positioning Theory to Examine Complex Interactions of a Professional Literacy Learning Collaborative" with his advisor Dr. Cynthia Brock and two academics from two other universities in the U.S. Thilina contributed to developing a paper based on the findings of the project and presented at the Positioning Theory Conference 2024 held in Kuopio, Finland.





## LRCC LOOKING FORWARD

As we continue to offer professional development and to conduct needs assessments across the state, we are always seeking ways to build capacity and to address the unique needs of educators and districts. We are currently applying for grants to support teachers in obtaining their literacy endorsements through the College of Education.

Many teachers have expressed a strong interest in pursuing the literacy endorsement, but the cost of the program has been a significant barrier for them. To address this, the LRCC aims to fund a cohort of 10 teachers from across the state to earn their literacy endorsements. We seek to establish an endowment to sustain this opportunity for Wyoming teachers—ensuring that this opportunity for literacy learners continues for years to come. By doing so, the LRCC is enhancing statewide capacity by equipping teachers with research-based practices that they can implement in their classrooms, which ultimately benefits their students.

The LRCC is also developing literacy professional development modules grounded in research on best practices. There will be a total of nine modules, each featuring research articles, expert videos, practice guides, and additional resources designed to support literacy improvement. Teachers and others in Wyoming schools can progress through the modules at their own pace with support from LRCC faculty through onsite visits and virtual assistance as needed. These modules will be available for districts to purchase and offer valuable resources for current faculty, onboarding new staff, and reimagining literacy practices.

# LRCC 2024 PROJECTS

## STATE OUTREACH





### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**FCSD #6** - Wind River Elementary School - Vocabulary Instruction  
Dr. Linda Kucan visit to FCSD #6

**FCSD #38**- Arapahoe Elementary School - Writing Instruction

**SCSD #1** - Pinedale Middle and High School - Vocabulary Instruction

**BHCSD #1** - Burlington/ Cowley - 6-12 Vocabulary

**TSCD #1** - District-wide Leadership Improvement

**PCSD #1** - District-wide Professional Development



### COLLABORATION

- Wyoming Department of Education
  - » LINC
    - ✓ Coaches and School Leader Book Study
    - ✓ Facilitating Monthly Webinars on Elementary
  - » American Indian Education for All
    - ✓ Modules for K-3 teachers
- McRel International
- Region 11 Comprehensive Center



### LITERACY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**FCSD #1** - Lander

**JCSD #1** - Buffalo



### WYOLEARN COURSES

- Literacy Leadership I
- Literacy Leadership II
- Dyslexia Modules



### LITERACY AWARDS

- Carol Mead Leaders in Literacy Award Recipients
  - » Melanie Hornbeck - Cheyenne
  - » Jennifer Hayward - Pinedale



### LITERACY CONFERENCE

- 16th Fall Annual Literacy Conference - High Quality Vocabulary Instruction P - 12
  - » Dr. Dianna Townsend
  - » Dr. Doris Baker
  - » Gary Soto



### TUTORING CLINIC

- Sara Pommarane, NBCT, Distinguished Teacher in Residence
- Fall 2023 Session
  - » 9 students from Albany County
  - » 7 tutors



### CONSULTING

- LCSD #1 -Middle and High School ELA



### FUTURE PROJECT IDEAS:

- Literacy Endorsement Cohorts
- Teacher in Residence Program

# BOARD OF ADVISORS

The LRCC Board of Advisors serve to guide the work of the Literacy Research Center and Clinic. Members spread our information and mission across the state, serve as an accountability agent for our work, and select the Carol Mead Leaders in Literacy award each year.

## MEMBERS

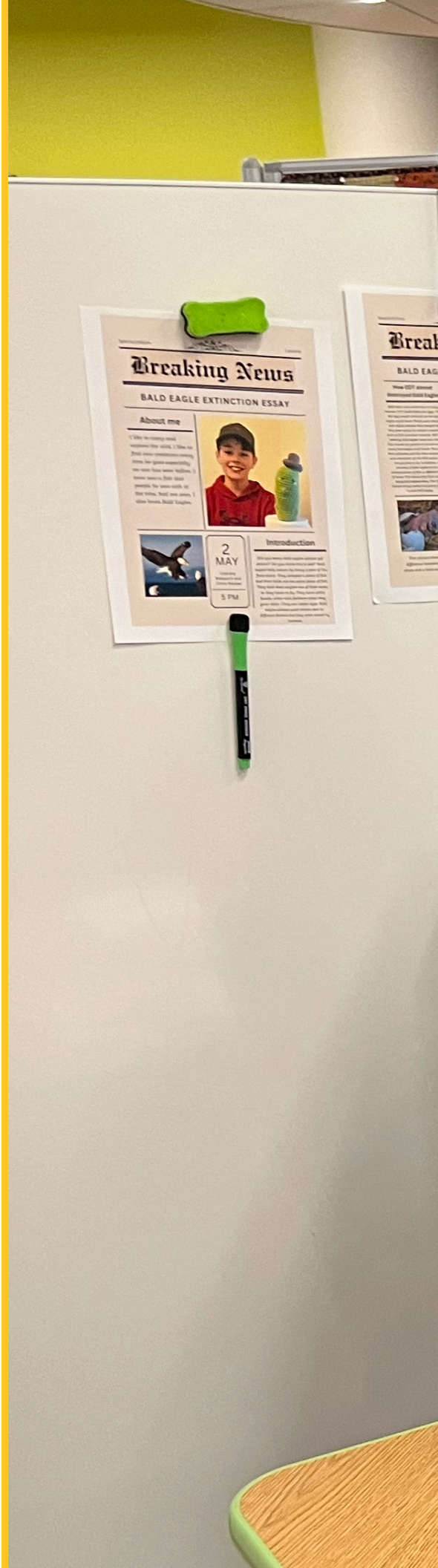
Senator Jeff Wasserburger  
Judy Catchpole

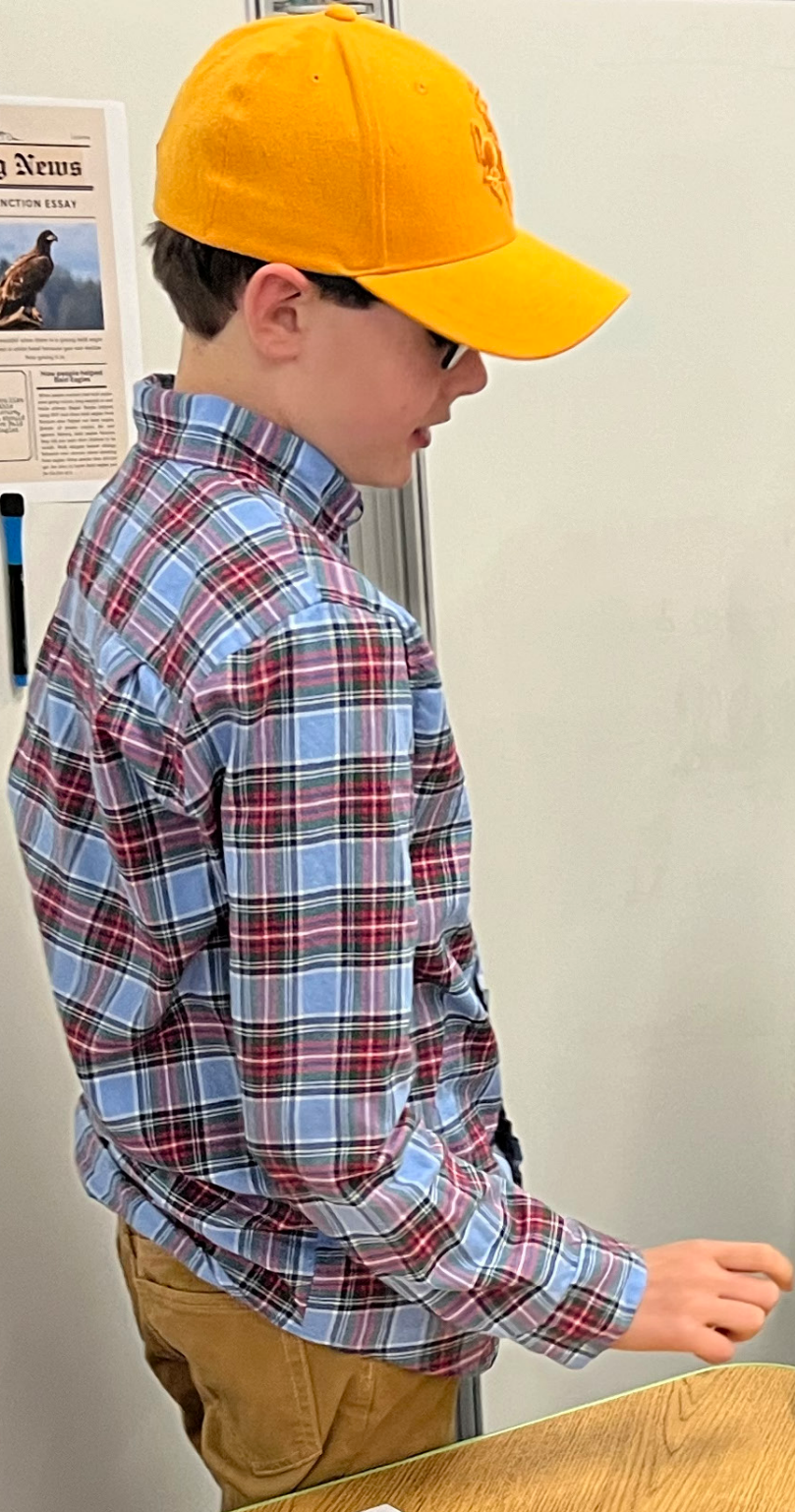
## MEMBERS

Brian Farmer  
Mary Garland  
Becky Symes  
Susan Anderson  
Affie Ellis  
Tracy Pare  
Tiffany Rehbein

## EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

Amy Spiker  
Scott Thomas  
Leigh Hall  
Cynthia Brock  
Tyler Spear  
Superintendent Jillian Balow







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