

**RAC-Midwest Region
Meeting #2
October 16, 2023**

- [Bryan] Good morning, and welcome. This is the meeting for the Midwest RAC for...I'm sorry, this is the Regional Advisory Committee for the Midwest RAC. The date is Monday, 16 October, 2023. Time is 11:07 a.m. Eastern, 10:07 a.m. Central. Now, before we get started, I just want to do a quick check on attendees, and make sure we have folks here.

Okay. As a reminder for those of you who are joining, this meeting is open to members of the public, and it will be recorded as a matter of the public record. My name is Bryan Keohane, and I'm the Designated Federal Official for the Midwest RAC. Thank you for joining this morning. I'll now conduct a roll call. So if you can, when I call your name, and this will be in alphabetical order, if that helps, when I call your name, please simply unmute yourself, say "present," and then re-mute yourself, and we'll continue along with the other pieces of our agenda today.

All right, beginning roll call now. Bobbie Burnham?

- [Bobbie] Here.

- Thank you. Constance Beecher?

- [Constance] Here.

- Thank you. Matthew Bowen?

- [Matthew] Here.

- Thank you. Kimberly Biryanic? Okay. Stacey Gray Akyea?

- [Stacey] Akyea, here.

- Oh, thank you. I apologize for that. Jessica Horowitz-Moore?

- [Jessica] Here.

- Thank you. Mark Klaisner?

- Okay. Joseph Murphy?

- [Joe] Present.

- Thank you. Erick Pruitt? Okay. Chris Ruddy?

- [Chris] Here.

- Thank you. Tammie Sebastian? Okay. Shawn Smith? LaTonya Turner?

- [Dr. Turner] Present.

- Thank you. All right, give me one moment to tally this up. We have eight members present for the RAC, and we have established quorum. The meeting may proceed with all voting privileges.

As a reminder today, you can do the usual, much like we did in the previous meeting. Please use the Raise Hand feature in Zoom. If we can just all test that function, everybody hit that Raise Hand button, and we'll make sure it works. Awesome. This is just like a classroom.

Thanks so much. You can put it down. All right, so that is how you engage during today's discussion. Our RAC Chair, Bobbie Burnham will call on you when you raise your hand as part of the discussion report, to acknowledge you and allow you to make your comments, and your suggestions and feedback. Today's agenda, obviously we went through the call to order and roll call, we'll review the meeting, what the objectives are for today, to review the assessment report outline.

This is the report that you'll produce as part of these RAC committees. Provide an overview of the needs-sensing activities that were conducted since Meeting 1, we'll deliberate on the top five priorities and recommendations that were identified in those needs-sensing activities. We'll vote on those priorities, and then discuss the assessment assignments and timelines.

And as part of that, we'll also vote to establish a subcommittee, or multiple subcommittees for writing the report. And then, of course, lastly, we'll adjourn. Next slide. By the end of the meeting today, you should have reviewed additional input from stakeholders and public comments to finalize the assessment of the critical educational needs of the Midwest Region, and deliberate on those educational needs to finalize recommendations that will be included in the assessment report.

Finally, we will establish subcommittees to complete those assessments.

- [Mikkaka] Hi. I am Mikkaka Overstreet, and I am the Liaison for the Midwest Region. I'm going to go over the assessment report outline briefly. So the product of this work is going to be this report.

The assessment report will begin with a discussion of the information collected and provide a general summary of committee findings. Next, the report will review the committee's proposed priorities and recommendations. The agreed-upon recommendations must address the questions here, why did the committee determine this as a priority need for the region?

How will you justify to the U.S. Department of Education that this should be a priority for the region? What technical assistance support can the Department provide to address this priority? And are there other educational issues that were not determined to be priorities, but

the Department should be aware of and consider as they plan for the next five years and beyond? So this is the general outline.

As you can see, it starts with a cover page introduction, which will be provided by MSG. After that, the executive summary introduction and data collection will be completed by the RAC members, and that will include what were your methods of outreach, things from regional education leadership, as well as public comments, a summary of findings, and priorities.

And then the big section is going to be the recommendations. Each of the priorities that the committee has voted on will fit under one of these areas that is already listed under recommendations. So as we vote on priorities, and as we vote on the subcommittees, perhaps that will be right in the report, note that those priorities will go under these sections.

And so your sections are supporting strong instruction and academic achievement, supporting specific student populations, supporting teachers, leaders, and school personnel, supporting student and educator well-being, developing an effective technical assistance response, and other priorities. So know that if there are other areas of need that are important, but they were not prioritized in the outline, that should be considered for the Department's awareness and future consideration, they will be placed there.

And then, of course, there will be a conclusion, and an appendix, if there are any additional documents there. And I will pass over to our chairperson. You're muted, Bobbie.

- Sorry. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for being with us this morning. I'm just going to give a quick overview of our needs-sensing activities, and then we are going to talk about our top priorities in a much deeper conversation.

So in reviewing the needs-sensing activities that were completed, it began with our first meeting conversation, as well as the data that our federal partners provided, the background files from the contractor, the state profiles.

We had many public comments received. Those public comments highlighted the areas that were identified in our first meetings discussion. And as those public comments were updated throughout this process, it really highlighted that we were definitely on track with those focus areas we identified in our first meeting.

We also had a RAC data collaboration board that was developed with both national and regional resources provided on that collaboration board. We had a RAC tracking stakeholders table, and then of course our needs-sensing matrix, which highlights the Midwest RAC focus areas, and provides additional data, as well as some analysis and key questions related to each of those focus areas.

The data collected primarily was the public comments. There were a couple surveys, as well as some stakeholder engagement. The high-level trends of that data collection included, of course, workforce, which was I think by far at the top of the list.

There were some comments around whole child focus, prioritizing marginalized groups, the social-emotional learning component, which includes school climate, school safety, and then, of course, attendance. And then a lot of comment around early care and education, and the literacy, science of reading component that is going on nationally.

So those were the bulk of our needs-sensing data collections, and now we're going to have a conversation around the top five priorities.

And those top five priorities are... We all completed a survey, ranking our focus areas as priorities, and the number one priority was teacher workforce, which includes teacher shortages, recruitment, retention, diversifying.

And there is a few additional comments to note related to workforce in the area of compensation and reciprocity from state to state, and the special ed workforce really rose to the top as an identified area of need in that workforce.

The second priority came out as early childhood education, specifically focusing on access and alignment, and program requirements. We had a few additional comments that highlighted kindergarten readiness, kind of defining what that is, and how we measure that, and prioritizing our most at-risk children to receive these services.

Our third priority was student well-being and mental health, including impact on attendance. And our fourth was supporting special populations, multilingual learners, students with disabilities. And there were additional comments, including serving the growing refugee and migrant populations.

And our last priority was evidence-based literacy instruction, the science of reading. There were some additional comments around the role of teacher prep in this literacy conversation, and there was some conversation in the comments around teacher licensure, and the assessments that teachers must take.

So those are our top priorities. So I believe our next step is to have a brief conversation, about 10 minutes on each of those five priorities. And we will use the Raise Your Hand feature...I've got to move my...and we will be taking notes. And the conversation needs to be focused on why or why not this priority, the rationale for why this is a priority, and what evidence for this priority.

And I will ask a committee member to nominate a priority for discussion, and then focus on why this should or should not be a priority, explanation to the Department on why this is a priority, and ideas on types of support that could be provided to the Department on how to support this as a priority.

Who would like to nominate priority one, teacher workforce, to be included as a priority in the Midwest report to the U.S. Department of Ed? Oh, Bryan, you have your hand up?

- Thanks, Bobbie. Just a quick question. You can go through each one of the priorities, and then we'll vote after that discussion.

- Oh, okay.

- So get the list and just as a matter of clarification, we've had a couple of additional RAC members join. I just want to acknowledge, thank you for joining, Erick. And as a note, Tammie Sebastian is sitting in the attendee list, if we can move her to the panelists, because she should be a RAC member. Thank you.

- So beginning the discussion on our top priority, teacher workforce, that, if you're able to look at your needs-sensing matrix, provided some information on the data we collected, as well as what I thought were some really key questions that we might want to consider as a deliverable or a recommendation on what the regional support might look like or include.

So I'm going to open it up for conversation, and please raise your hand if you would like to add to the conversation for teacher workforce. And I may need help identifying hands up. I don't have a full screen.

Any comments on teacher workforce, knowing that it was by far something that rose to the top of all of our needs-sensing data collection efforts?

- Joe?

- Hey, happy to get us started. Obviously, you know, this should be a priority for our group. We had a lot of great discussion at the previous meeting, and conversations that I've had not only with educators in this area, but business members as well in our state, in Iowa.

Very clearly, teachers are on the front line of economic development, educating that future generation of workforce in all of our states. And so an effort to make sure that our teacher workforce is also primed and ready for the future of our economies, I can't think of a more important need, as we think about the future needs of all of our states.

- Thank you, Joe. Other comments, thoughts? Constance?

- Yes. I would say, in addition to attracting, you know, retention is a big priority. In our program, you know, our numbers are pretty good as far as enrollment of people in teacher preparation programs, but then what we see is folks leaving the profession in great numbers, and we're starting to see a lot of concern from our teacher preparation candidates about what they're going to experience.

Thank you, Constance. Stacey?

- Thank you. I...I am not disagreeing that this is indeed a priority, I'm just wondering about within teacher workforce, when I look at the needs-sensing matrix, it seems to be more defined by preparation.

But then, you know, inside of districts, there's also recruitment and retention and diversifying. So there are just so many different areas within teacher workforce, I'm wondering if there are priorities within this priority?

And then I guess the second thing that I really think is important outside of preparation is for, you know, within districts, recruitment, retention, and diversifying really bumps up against already-established agreements with shortages, and who gets to stay, and who leaves.

And so I'm not sure, but I think that there is some discussion around the barriers to retention that would have to be at least discussed or understood.

Because I think that recruitment takes a lot of resources, and we would want to be sure that we could retain the people that we recruit.

- Thank you, Stacey. LaTonya?

- Yeah, thank you, Stacey, for saying all of that. I was on the same page as you, especially being on the other side, preparing teachers. I know someone expressed that there's a concern from aspiring educators about what they're going to face, and that's definitely what we're seeing.

So it's not so much a matter of recruitment, though that's huge, it's a great deal around retention, and the barriers around retaining. The other thing that I thought about too is the importance of this as a priority, as it pertains to academic achievement, that opportunity gap. The more that we have a teacher shortage, to me, it exacerbates the educational disparities, and the achievement gap or opportunity gap that we're seeing as well, especially as it pertains to those who are coming from lower socioeconomic communities.

Because we know that there's research out there that says disproportionately, students who are coming from those areas are greatly affected.

- Thank you. Kim...

- [Kim] Hello. I agree with the retention, and...but recruitment is really going to be important. If we look at our workforce right now, and in the educational field, there's going to be a large retirement, I think, coming up, especially when we're looking at the Iowa numbers, that we need to make sure we have the pipeline to provide that, fill that gap when the retirements happen.

- Thank you, Kim. Matthew...

- I'll just echo what LaTonya said. I did make a note for underserved communities, to make sure that they become some type of priority or focus in this. But also looking at not generalizing the teacher shortage, but also looking at the most in-demand areas of licensure.

So the secondary, also maybe the sciences and the maths. That needs to be a focus, because that's where we're finding the bulk of our shortage, is in those specialized areas in the secondary education field.

- Thank you, Matthew. Any other thoughts on why or why not this should be a priority? I think we also kind of got into our second question, which is explaining to the Department on why this is a priority.

Tammie...

- [Tammie] Sorry. I was just now joining in the panelist mode, so I apologize. Mine is just more simplistic in the fact that if this isn't the top priority, all those other priorities underneath it will not be solved. You have to address this first before we can go.

So I don't know how you want to put that into words, but if you don't have teachers, and they're providing the science of reading, early childhood, all of it, it all comes back to this. So, thank you.

- Thank you, Tammie. Erick...

- [Erick] I think we also need to consider, as models for educating students change with regards to post-secondary readiness, our ability to be able to serve kids in some of our CTE fields. We need to think about what that looks like moving into the future also, as far as how we recruit teachers. Are they in traditional student undergrad models, or are we looking...how are we looking to the workforce to recruit people that can teach students in those different fields in CTE?

- Thank you, Erick. I'm not seeing any other hands up, so if I'm missing one, please let me know. As far as evidence around this priority, I think, you know, if we look at some of our needs-sensing data collection, and then those state profiles and all that state data, you know, there's quite a bit of data that shows, as well as a high number of public comments in this area as well, does anybody have any other thoughts on evidence for this being a priority?

Let's think about ideas on types of support that can be provided to the Department on how to support this priority.

Any thoughts or any strategies you know of in your states that have worked well, not worked well, that we could learn lessons from, or ideas or thoughts around how we can recommend to the Department on supporting us in this top priority?

Tammie?

- I think Erick was first, if he wants to go.

- Oh, Erick. I'm sorry.

- That's okay.

- Thanks, Tammie. Mentorship has been a huge focus around the state, and so I think that grants that provide funding for mentoring of new teachers would be very useful.

- Thank you, Erick. Tammie?

- Yeah, that was sort of going along the lines I was thinking, funding to be able to... I know that a lot of times, schools are putting a significant amount of training when teachers come to them, like they're not really prepared. So coming out of, you know, college, and how much time they spend... So I mean, I don't know if grants is the answer, but something where...you know, that they would be able to hold these teachers in a long enough time to be able to train them, and they don't leave and go to other places, you know what I mean?

So I don't know. Something along grants, but just the support, and being able to... And I don't know if that's a pre-service issue, them not coming out fully being...you know, having what they need? And then districts having to spend a good amount of time training teachers.

So I don't know how you... Yeah, that sounds good.

- Thank you, Tammie. Erick, your hand is still up. Okay, there.

- Yeah. Yep. The other thing I wanted to mention, funding for paying student teachers. And so this could be a barrier for some of our rural communities, and some of our suburban communities. And so any funding that would allow school districts to pay student teachers for more than a semester, or for a semester, or for more than a semester I think would be very impactful to different districts in Iowa.

- Thank you, Erick. Constance...

- Just want to agree with what Erick said there. Students would definitely like to be paid for their time. And it is something with many of them having to work jobs, that's really difficult. Another sort of idea that doesn't seem straightforward, but it is related, is more supports for mental health for our workforce, and for students.

So leadership, personal mental health support for teachers, and then help for them on how do they also support the mental health of the students in their classrooms. Sometimes when we think about retention, pay comes up a lot, and of course that's an issue.

But a lot of the... Something that's more impactful is the stress of the profession, the stress of things that teachers face, and then the stress of working with students.

- Thank you, Constance. Thanks, Bryan, I was just thinking that, too. Quickly, just...Matthew, and then LaTonya, and then we'll move on to priority number two.

- Just briefly, I think there's also an interest to maybe incentivize higher education, making sure that these types of programs and courses for young people at the higher ed level, that they exist, and that these are not programs that they're looking to actually reduce or cut.

- Thank you, Matthew.

- So Matthew and Constance, you took my two. But I also want to add that there is a TQP grant, it's a federal grant, the Teacher Quality Preparation Program grant. I would encourage the Department, and I know that this is all legislative-driven as well, to continue to fund that program.

Because it does help those of us who are on the educator preparation side provide some of that funding that you talked about earlier, like stipends for our residents to be able...a living wage stipend, to be able to teach during that year. So I would encourage more funding towards that as well.

- Thank you, LaTonya. Great conversation, thank you all. Let's move on to priority number two, which is early care and education, with priorities or the focus topics being access, program requirements, and alignment around that pre-K through 3rd-grade learning continuum. So...

- Bobbie?

- Oh, Bryan [crosstalk 00:30:58.936]

- Bobbie, this is Bryan. Before we move on, can we call for a vote on that priority, whether to retain or proceed? Or whether to retain it, or remove it?

- Yes.

- Thank you.

- So members, as I call for a vote, please use the Raise Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record. I call for the vote of the Midwest Region RAC to include workforce as a priority.

- Please use your Raise Hand function to vote yea or nay.

- [Anne] Screenshot taken.

- So I have to count the votes, and state... But I don't have a full screenshot.

So do we... Bryan, can you help with the number of votes?

- You passed that 10. I'm sorry, there's 10.

- Okay. So workforce is determined by the RAC to be a priority. Okay. Moving on to priority number two, why or why not should early childhood education be a priority?

Tammie...

- I'm sorry, I just didn't take my hand down.

- Oh, okay. All right.

- Sorry.

- Jessica...

- Good morning. So I believe this should be a priority, as the more services and the more education that our kids could come into kindergarten with, the stronger they are in those early grades. I feel like this also goes to our, you know, retention of teachers, to our last one, because if the students are prepared and ready to be in school, and have some basic knowledge, then their teachers are better able to work with them, they're not playing catch-up in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade of how to do school, and they're able to really support those students.

And then just along with the alignment, again, the more that our students have those basic elements, they're able to, again, transition that a lot easier. And it's really hard when we have students... Some students that have high-quality preschool education experiences who are able to do that, and then peers that have had no or limited early childhood experiences, and there's just such a huge discrepancy in the learners that are entering the classrooms.

- Thank you, Jessica. Bryan, am I able to comment?

- Yes, you can.

- Okay. Erick, why don't you go first, and then I'll add my two cents.

- I think that this should be a priority, based off of how we see the job market changing, and how that trickles down to what we're being asked to teach in our schools. The more prepared our youngest students are, it allows us to prepare them for their post-secondary goals moving forward.

And so I think the more we invest in early education, it has a domino...a multiplying effect on what we're able to do with those students as they matriculate through school.

- Thank you, Erick. So from my perspective in Minnesota, you know, early care and education is a huge economic priority for people being able to go to work, and so we've really worked hard in that area. But I think as a system, the system must be aligned so that

those Head Starts, those childcare centers, and those school-based pre-Ks all are speaking the same language, and have the same set of requirements, and the same quality teachers.

So I think looking at that system, you know, starting with age three through age eight is really important, and can be impactful on huge economic values down the road. Matthew, did you have your hand up?

Matthew?

- Actually, I did, and you kind of took the words right out of my mouth. But talking about, regardless of if we like to say it or not, but school also does become childcare for families, especially in areas where, you know, it's low economic. And then there's opportunities for people to re-enter the workforce when there's quality childcare, and there's no better quality childcare than what we can do here as making this a priority.

To me, this would be pretty much the number one priority. The gap also, we're seeing students come in, especially in at-risk communities coming in with really low entrance scores, and really, that's just because it's not...early childcare is just not available in the communities, or the childcare that is available doesn't have an aligned curriculum with accountability attached.

- Thanks, Matthew. LaTonya...

- So you both really took mine, and I just want to add with what Matt said, you know, hopefully by having this as a priority, and providing quality early childhood education, it will decrease the amount of money that is spent on remediation as well.

- Thank you. Tammie...

- Yeah, kind of along those lines too, that we do know that early childhood, they're more prepared for those other grades that they'll be coming into. And then also very specifically for students with disabilities, we know that early childhood, early intervention is key.

So specifically that.

- Thank you, Tammie. Any other thoughts before we talk about... Constance?

- Just one last quick point. Especially in terms of literacy outcomes, brain development in young children is particularly important. And unlike other cognitive skills, language has a sensitive window that starts to close around age six, so it's really vital for later academics to have that early, very enriched language and literacy environment, and we have an opportunity to really assist communities to make sure that that's more even than it is now.

Thank you, Constance. So if we're thinking about the second question around the rationale, I think again, our state profiles have really rich data, as well as many of the public comments in this area as well.

Does anyone have any other thoughts around evidence? Tammie?

- I believe there's a lot of research that supports everything that we just said.

- Absolutely. Thank you. Jessica?

- Along with the research, I also put it in some of the documents, it's like the NIEER, the National... Okay, Bobbie, you're shaking your head, so you know what I'm talking about. They put out, you know, their yearly state of preschool in the country, and I think throughout the Midwest. I know in Ohio, I mean, our scores are ranked very low, and I see that across, you know, other states, and I think that's a good place to start in terms of what's needed, and where we rank compared to the rest of the country.

- That's a great point. NIEER offers a report every year, kind of a report card on every state, and they have ten high-quality elements, and they rank states on those high-quality elements. So that kind of leads into ideas for how this priority might be addressed, is looking at those 10 high-quality elements, and seeing how the Comprehensive Centers could further support states in ensuring those 10 high-quality elements are being met.

That's one way. Other thoughts on technical assistance activities in this area? Stacey?

- I think alignment is really key and crucial here. Not just alignment across early childhood educational providers, but you know, one of the things we find is our students do really, really well in pre-K, and by the time they get to 3rd grade, you know, those early wins have, like, dissipated.

So, you know, I think helping districts align pre-K to 12 without it being overly, you know, overly...overwhelming on the pre-K setting I think would really be helpful.

And then the other thing that I think might offer some assistance is, you know, what are the models that are situated in communities that are best practice? Because we do know that we have some early childhood educators that are doing very well, and so how do we, as a district, use that as a leverage point, as a positive as we sort of transition into making pre-K part of our regular grade span?

- Thank you, Stacey. So just quickly, Tammie, and then Matthew, and then we'll need to move on to our third priority.

- I don't know if this is too far reaching to say this, but would it be too hard to ask for universal preschool? Is that too big of an ask in here?

- Thanks, Tammie. Matthew...

- I was just going to say, I think we just need to look at how we fund school in general K through 12. And then we need to look at similar funding, and how we want to bring down that funding to early childcare for really, our youngest population, where we can make the

greatest impact. And this really could be the greatest impact that we could actually see, with everything we know about the importance of, you know, early learners and early childcare.

- Thanks, Matthew. So members, as I call for a vote, please use the Raise Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record. I call for a vote for the Midwest Region to include early care and education as a priority. And I see...what do I see, 10, per count?

- Screenshot taken.

- Thank you. With that, we will move early care and education to our priority, being included in the report. Now on to priority three, which is student well-being, including mental health and attendance, why or why not should this be a priority?

Ten minutes, who would like to start this conversation? Matthew...

- Not to oversimplify it, but just more of a maintenance of effort of what we're currently doing with the current funding we received with our ESSER dollars. My convictions are maybe not to do anything new, but to stay the course. But maybe that's not popular.

- Thank you, Matthew. Erick...

- I think that we've just seen a significant increase in student violence. It's progressed over time. Based off of the resources that districts have in Iowa, compared to the need, I don't think that we can fill that gap of services needed for our students.

We're seeing an increase in student suicides, and so we're just needing a lot more support and resources both in district, and then in our local communities, with filling those gaps of support that are needed for our students that have been identified, and those that have not been identified needing that mental health support.

- Thank you, Erick. So I see Jessica, Joe, and Chris's hand up. So I'm not sure who was first, so let's just go with Chris.

- [inaudible 00:45:59.036] with the increase in student behavior, but it's also having that impact on attendance where our attendance is...we have a much lower attendance rate in all of our schools as compared to what the attendance rates were before COVID.

- Thank you, Chris. Joe...

- Thank you. I would just add, obviously agree with everything that the group has stated, but maybe to look through it in a different lens, from a business community's perspective again, this is absolutely foundational to the health of an economy. If parents or guardians are not able to provide the resources that their children require, particularly in the mental health standpoint, it has a tremendous impact downstream on the economy.

Those individuals then won't be able to work. If they are working, they'll be stressed and potentially unwell themselves, understandably so. And so capturing the students in this area is absolutely important from the current economy's perspective, but then just obviously helping those young people work through these potential issues so that then they, in time, can participate fully in the business community, in the economy, which will obviously be a positive, safe thing.

- Thank you, Joe. Jessica...

- For this, I think it should be a priority. If students' needs are not being met, they're not going to be able to be successful in the classroom, which goes along with, you know, struggling academically, but also on attendance. We have a chronic absenteeism issue in this country, and the rates are so much higher than pre-COVID. And from our research, a lot of those absences are due to mental health needs of the children, and the families.

Also, I think that this impacts our teacher recruitment and retention, because I believe that teachers are coming into classrooms, like, fully unprepared to deal with students that have these significant level of needs that they do, because teachers shouldn't be expected to be the teacher, the mental health therapist, the counselor, all the things. So if those needs are being met, then teachers are able to do what they're in their classroom to do, is to teach.

And I completely agree with the business sense too, that all of these needs, you know, affect families and parents. And just all around, if our kids' needs aren't being met, they're not going to be able to be successful. Also, I mean, this would also fall into our research area, but we have the Surgeon General's warning about the mental health crisis for youth.

- Thank you, Jessica. LaTonya...

- And I just want to add to what you said, Jessica, about the teachers, and the stress and the burnout. So I want to make sure that we put something in there that focuses on the teacher's well-being as well, because I know that that's something that we've started doing in our educator preparation program, is focusing on the social and emotional well-being of our aspiring educators as they're going into the field, because we're seeing so many of our alumni being stressed and burnt out, and leaving the field, so going back to retention.

- Thank you, LaTonya. And Stacey...

- So this is definitely going to be an unpopular opinion, but I think that when we are discussing mental health of students, it's a slippery slope. One thing that I have noticed is that we don't all have the same meaning.

I don't just mean us in this committee, but I mean across the educational landscape, we don't all speak the same language with regard to mental health, even SEL, the terminology and the landscape. And I think it's dangerous for us to, as educators, make, like, a whole other medical dimension a priority. I think what's appropriate is that we develop partnerships with

people who are, you know, licensed, or able to make diagnoses, not school social workers and/or counselors.

But this is just...it's just a really slippery slope, and I've seen well-meaning professional educators do harm, you know? This can mean anything from, you know, restorative climates, all the way to, you know, diagnoses of students.

And it's just very dangerous, and I think, particularly with regard to students of color, Black and Brown, Indigenous students, the tendency to pathologize is high. And I would hate... And what I don't like to see is that mental health, whatever that means, gets in the way of learning, and that the student can't learn because they have all of these mental health needs.

It just becomes so unhealthy. And so, I just would hope that we would be very cognizant of the landscape and be willing to learn what we need to learn, and sort of place it appropriately within our system.

- Thank you, Stacey. We have about two minutes left for this, so Tammie, would you like to go quickly?

- Yeah.

- And then we'll need to speak about strategies we want to recommend.

- Very quickly, I don't even know if it will go here or go somewhere else, but just going off of what Stacey was sharing, I agree to an extent with her on that. And I think for me, what I was thinking is we have this term "mental health" that encompasses so many different things.

And when we're talking about actual diagnoses, or we're looking... It needs to be much more descriptive in what we're looking at, and when we're talking about mental health, and how we support it. All of us, every single person that's on here has mental health needs. That doesn't describe a diagnosis, that doesn't describe, you know, our daily stressors.

Like, we all have mental health. So I guess for me, it's about being descriptive of what that is, and we need to define that just nationally, on what we're looking at with mental health needs. I'll stop there.

- Thanks. Thank you, Tammie. So thinking about what evidence we have, there was a good suggestion on the research piece, again, we also have that data already provided to us, any other quick thoughts around evidence? Matthew?

- Not under evidence. I was just...rationale, just getting ready for the next one.

- Okay. How about ideas for how this priority may be addressed through technical assistance from the Comp Centers? Matthew, Stacey, and Kim. Matthew...

- Just looking at it, the earlier comment I made, maybe to qualify that a little bit more, is September of '24, all the ESSER money falls off. A lot of districts across the nation are using these ESSER dollars in order to support the well-being and the mental health of the young people. When these dollars fall off, we're not even going to be able to continue to do the good work we've been doing, and then we're all going to be in a deficit.

The other piece is, to the earlier comments about defining mental health, mental health, and what's generally needed for young people is very different than a student who's going through trauma, trauma is very different than just the general mental health. So looking at maybe an idea is...or how to support this, looking more at more of a community learning model, which also includes more of the partnership model, but also focusing on wraparound services or whole child opportunities for young people.

Maybe just something more blanket, as a suggestion, or a best practice would be...would support the masses, and then obviously looking at trauma maybe in a different scope.

- Thank you, Matthew. Stacey...

- Thank you, Matthew. That was a lot of my comment, about how it could be addressed through technical assistance. I'd want to see, like, a very thorough maybe framework in partnership with potentially another, you know, federal department, as well as some ideas about what mental health, you know, outside of the extremes looks like situated from different perspectives, different racial, ethnic, linguistic groups, what mental health...

You know, some ideas of what it means to be mentally healthy is situated in context for us to learn from. And partnerships within communities that represent the health of the community.

- Thank you, Stacey. And I apologize, we're going to have to move to a vote on this so we can get to the last two priorities. So members, as I call for a vote, please use your Raise Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot.

I call for a vote for the Midwest Region to include mental health supports as a priority. And I believe we have 10, and we will move mental health to be included in our report.

The next, fourth priority is supporting special populations.

- Bobbie, before we proceed, quick question. Just if I can have the tech folks confirm that they were able to get a screenshot of the raised hands for that priority?

- I did get a screenshot. Thank you for checking.

- Thank you.

- I'm sorry. Thank you.

- Sorry to interrupt.

- That's okay. I'm just aware of our limited time. Okay, supporting special populations, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. And as I mentioned, there are some comments around refugee and migrant students as well. So why or why not should this be a priority? Tammie, and then Kim, and then Erick.

- Again I'm with the simplistic things that are just like, right there. It should be a priority because this includes all students.

These are not separate populations. They're special, is what we're calling them, but they're not separate. So this includes all students, and we should have that focus. That's why it should be the top priority.

- Thank you, Tammie. Kim...

- Through the data, you can see that there's pretty significant gaps, learning gaps, probably learning opportunities, so it kind of speaks to that second one as well there. But I agree, it's all students, and we need to focus on all.

- Thank you, Kim. Erick?

- I agree with Tammie and Kim, it's all students. But with looking at all students, we need to ensure and understand that some students may need different types of support. We can't provide the same supports to every child and expect similar outcomes. And so with these different student populations that we are receiving in our districts, we need to make sure that we're targeted in how we're supporting these different groups of students in order to get the outcomes that we all want.

- Thank you, Erick. Jessica...

- I think this goes to, like, our Tier 1 instruction. If we're supporting everyone at Tier 1, then...and I do think this should be a priority, then we're helping to lift up these children, and figure out if they have their Tier 1 instruction, and what else is needed for these students with special populations. I think especially with the multilingual learners, we're definitely getting more and more of those multilingual learners every year, so we definitely need more supports there.

And our students with disabilities, we have certain categories where, you know, we have the low incidence, but certain categories like autism that is just really rising in our state, and wanting to make sure that we are knowledgeable, and can meet the needs of all of our students.

- Thank you, Jessica. Erick, did you have... Okay. Any other thoughts on why this should be a priority? Chris...

- I think it's important to note here that staffing is even more of an issue when it comes to supporting special populations, because when schools are short-staffed, this can be one of the first areas that staff are pulled from, you know, when you're just short, and you need to figure out where are you going to put teachers?

- Thanks. Thank you, Chris. Tammie?

- I would also say too, you know, definitely, I mean, this is probably the same for our multilingual learners as well as students with disabilities, and any other populations that we didn't identify here. But I can tell you as far as students with disabilities, we all know that IDEA has not been fully funded since the beginning of IDEA, and that still continues to be...you know, that still continues to be a problem for districts.

And going back to whether that's providing Tier 1 instruction, whether that's providing, you know, staffing, all those things I think comes back to, you know, the fact that we're not even able to support our students with disabilities with the proper funding that we were promised, so...

- Thank you, Tammie.

- Yep.

- So if we think about rationale, we know that there is significant data in this area. Any other thoughts on what evidence to include in this priority? Tammie?

- I know the data we talked about as far as, like, what we have in there as far as graduation rates, I mean, the list goes on and on and on, reading, our...you know, what reading looks like, math, I think, is a significant... just the report cards in general I think is a lot of evidence.

- Thanks, Tammie. What about technical assistance activities? As I listened, I wondered if continued support in the implementation of a multi-tiered systems of support framework, listening to the importance of Tier 1, and then serving those Tier 2 and Tier 3 students...

Other thoughts around technical assistance? Constance...

- This is something I think that's linked to the early learning priority. Again, funding for universal...funding for universal 0 to 5 would be amazing. And then also, I think some...where technical assistance would be helpful is helping people identify models that have good outcomes, evidence-based, you know, where are there areas that are having success?

- Thank you, Constance. Any other thoughts? Okay. With that, we'll call for a vote. Please use Raise Your Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record.

I call for a vote for the Midwest Region RAC to include special populations as a priority area. With that, I see 10 hands raised. And were you able to take a screenshot?

- Yes, screenshot's been taken.

- Thank you. With that, we will move special populations forward as a priority. Priority number five, evidence-based literacy instruction/science of reading, why or why not should this be a priority area? Tammie...

- More of a question than it is a statement, I guess, is when has it not been? Like, am I wrong?

Like, I don't know that... I'm kind of confused with what we're saying here as far as, like... I would hope we were always doing evidence-based literacy instruction.

- Well, that could be a lengthy conversation. I think the priority here is looking at how evidence-based is defined and accepting that the science of reading research is the priority with foundational instructional practices being implemented, or ensuring that they are being implemented, and that teachers are trained in those foundational reading practices.

And that's not been happening everywhere, so I think that's why this has become kind of a national story around ensuring that those practices are being used. Erick...

- I think when we look at post-pandemic state data and national data, we're seeing literacy rates decreasing in our elementary schools and middle schools. And also, you know, we can look at the NAEP. Additionally, I think it was a recent report, I don't know if we include it in this, but we're seeing drops in ACT, SAT performance.

And so I think that this literacy is the foundation for anything that we want our students to do, and so we need to reinforce the science of reading and ensuring that it's constantly evidence-based in order to fill those gaps for our kids to come to school, you know, below proficiency levels when they get to us.

- Thank you, Erick. LaTonya...

- I'm going to add to what Erick said, and I would also note that having this in the early grades in particular, the reading skills in early education can help prepare students to compete, I think, effectively globally, for our global economy.

Because we have to realize that our children just aren't competing against one another state to across the nation, and it's globally as well. And other countries are starting to put a great emphasis on the science of reading, so to me, this helps our students compete effectively in the global economy that really places a premium on literacy and communication skills.

- Thank you, LaTonya. Erick, did you...okay. I think too, you know, looking down the learning continuum, if you can ensure high-quality early literacy instructional practices are

implemented early on, you're going to have far fewer costs down the road for interventions, potential special ed costs. So it's just, again, part of that, you know, impact earlier on to save dollars down the road I think is another justification.

So Erick named some really good data points. I think all of us in our states have shown... Well, I shouldn't say all of us. I know in Minnesota; our literacy rates have been very dismal. And so I think state data, I think national data will provide that evidence. So let's think about what are our thoughts around technical assistance that can help states address the science of reading?

We'll start with Stacey, and then go to Jessica, and then Matthew.

- So I'm interested in helping with science of reading with special populations, right? I haven't seen a lot of evidence on the science of reading with populations that are more like special populations, so it'd be nice to have some help with that.

- Thank you, Stacey. Jessica...

- I think for this, support could also be needed for high-quality instructional materials to go along with science of reading. So we need to be able to help our schools, communities using really quality materials to be able to teach these things. Because I think that's what we've seen, is that there's not always the evidence-based models that are being taught, and some of the materials that schools and districts are using are not adequately preparing students.

- Thank you, Jessica. Matthew...

- Jessica, she took some words right out of my mouth, so thank you for that, Jessica. But also, higher ed and teacher prep programs, guaranteeing that our teacher prep programs and higher ed really does embrace the science of reading, and making sure that they're preparing those future teachers to come in and make the greatest impact with our young people. Thank you.

- Thank you, Matthew. Kim...

- One additional thing would be how do you coach teachers that are in the classroom? And what do those coaching models look like that can successfully help teachers implement the evidence-based or science of reading instructional practices?

- Thank you, Kim. Any final thoughts before we go to a vote? Okay. As I call for a vote, please use the Raise Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record. I call for a vote for the Midwest Region to include literacy/science of reading best practices as a priority.

- Screenshot taken.

- Thank you. With the number of votes, we will be moving literacy best practices forward as a priority in our Midwest Region report. So that concludes the discussion piece of our meeting today, and now we will be moving to establish subcommittees.

The subcommittee will need to be formed to lead the writing of the report. Multiple people may work on sections together in subcommittees to summarize the committee analysis in the report, and how to present to the Department.

So we can have one subcommittee writing the report, or we might choose to break into subcommittees per priority areas. So I move to establish...I think I'm doing this right, a subcommittee to write the report. And we need to determine if we have one writing committee will be sufficient, or multiple subcommittees.

Bryan, do I take this up for discussion?

- Yes, we can do that.

- Any thoughts on breaking into small groups to take a priority area, or just determining a core subcommittee to address all the priorities, using the report template? If it is of any benefit for context here, I'll throw out that you will receive assistance from both the Department, and our contracted supports.

You will not be doing this alone. And if you're a part of a subcommittee, you will also not be doing this alone, you will receive support to help in this process.

- Constance, and then Tammie...

- Yeah, that was sort of my question, what's the... Do we...or Bryan, could you give us guidance on what past committees have done? And you know, when you say support, more detail on what that is?

- Sure. We can set, I think, provide some examples of past reports. And you'll be helping to flesh out the narrative, the justification, and then what our contractor will help us do is sort of one voice...and they might even have a slide in here that goes into this. But they'll take the content, and then ensure that just in case there are multiple subcommittees for this particular region, they'll ensure that all of the subcommittees reflect sort of a similar voice, or the same voice so that the report reads as a cohesive whole.

- Tammie?

- You kind of answered my question about that, too. So it would come back around to us... So if we were meeting in, you know, separate smaller subcommittees, we would still see the general report together, right, before we move that forward? Is that correct?

Okay.

- Yes. So...yes. We're clarifying, as you already know, we're looking to set up Meeting 3, and this will, of course, be a key component of that. That meeting will be shorter, as the final meeting. But the intention there is to come up with a final committee, or a final report, draft report by 3 November. So the committee, or the subcommittees, that's the target date for that. That report will be shared individually with RAC members.

So you will have the ability to read and comment on it individually on your own, not as part of a group effort. And then when we come back together for Meeting 3, you can bring those comments and that feedback to that meeting.

- Okay. Thank you, Bryan. So based on that, I feel like there are some areas... I mean, I voted on all those areas to be priorities, but I think there are some areas I feel more strongly that I could add to. So I would feel better to be in...you know, to break it into smaller subcommittees. But that's just me.

- Any other thoughts on subcommittees, or one core committee?

- And if it helps, we did have a couple of slides with the report outline, if we wanted to go back to that so you could see that again, to kind of give a sense of what those subcommittees could look like as well.

Just an idea.

- That sounds good. Let's do that. I'm not sure who's running the slides. Matthew?

- I was going to say, there's only 10 of us on this meeting here today. Looking at breaking this into subcommittees, what would that look like? I guess my convictions are maybe we seek volunteers who would want to be on one, basically, committee to shoulder the majority of all of this work, because I just don't know what a subcommittee would look like.

I mean, again, there's 10 of us and we have 5 priorities.

- Thank you, Matthew. LaTonya...

- Yeah, Matthew, you took the words right out of my mouth. I originally had my hand raised, and then I put it back down, and then when you said what you did, I put it back up. Same question, Bobbie. There are only 10 of us, so how is that going to look? How is that going to work?

- Well, that's a very good point. So I'm wondering if we want to stay with one committee, and then just ask for volunteers to participate, knowing that they would contribute to one area probably a little more deeply than the other areas, depending on their area of expertise.

Is there an agreement with that process? Bryan, do we need to take a vote on that?

- Sure, let's take a vote for the record.

- So as Chairperson, I'm recommending that we have one committee to move forward with the report writing. Those in favor, please raise your hand so we can take a screenshot.

Do we have a screenshot?

- Screenshot taken.

- Thank you. So I believe our next priority is to determine who will serve or volunteer to be on the committee. I believe that we can't have a quorum, if that's right, so we need less than 10. Am I right in that, Bryan?

- Yes. So just as a point of order and clarification for the subcommittees, the...if we designate one subcommittee to write the report, that subcommittee has to be less than quorum, so it has to be less than, in our case, about seven or eight people for the committee. So I'm sorry, half of you can't participate.

I know there'll be shouts of joy, and that's okay. But I say that because if we meet quorum with the subcommittee for writing the report, then it actually qualifies as a meeting, and then we have to go through additional procedures on our end. So if we only have a couple of volunteers, it's perfectly fine to have one. If we have a number of volunteers hovering around that seven or eight mark, it is likely best to establish two separate subcommittees that would focus on specific priorities within the five that we've identified.

So maybe as a clarification, maybe we could just... Notwithstanding the previous vote, but if we just asked for each priority area identified, who would like to serve on a committee to work on that specific section of the report?

- Okay. With that, if you would like to work on priority number one, teacher workforce, please raise your hand. Bryan, will your team track?

Okay. I see LaTonya...I don't have...and Constance, and Erick. For priority number two, early childhood education, please raise your hand. I'd like to work on that as well.

Matthew, Chris, Kim, Joe... Did I miss anybody? Okay, priority number three, student well-being. Tammie, Matthew...

Did I miss anybody? Okay. Priority number four, supporting special populations. Tammie, Stacey, Kim. And priority number five, I'd like to work on that one with...and LaTonya, and Constance.

Okay.

- And one more thing, just as a point of order, if I can get a second for all of those that just volunteered for their committees, if we can have a second that were in favor of those committees, as established.

- Tammie, are you seconding? Thank you. And Chris, thank you.

- All right, we have a second. Thank you.

- Okay. So I believe we are on slide 14? Or did we do that? Oh, we did that. Okay. Then slide 15... All right, this is...let's see.

Subcommittees will begin meeting to draft reports. Our partners will reach out to schedule meetings, and the subcommittees will determine how many times to meet to complete the report.

On this timeline, you can see drafting to be completed by November 3rd, and then submitting to our partners for the one voicing, which they need five days to do, submission of the report to full committee as soon as possible, no later than November 13th.

RAC members will be provided the full report for their review no later than November 13th, full committee will meet again to review and vote to accept the report. And our established timeline for Meeting 3 to go over that is between the dates of November 14th through 16th, and then the report will be submitted to the Department by November 17th, after Meeting 3.

Any additional questions? And I believe that our partners will be kind of the lead on coordinating these subcommittees, and reaching out to each of us to help us get that work started.

- Is it all right if I take a moment to share the subcommittees as I have them, to make sure that I accurately recorded who said what, who said they'd be on which committee?

- Yes, thank you.

- Does this look accurate? Is anyone's name in the wrong place, or is anyone's name missing from an area? We have at least three people on every priority, except for priority three, just to note that.

- This is Jessica. Sorry, I was going to say that you can put me on priority three.

- Thank you, Jessica.

- You're welcome.

- Those look accurate from my notes.

- Based on the now shared, and that you can all see the subcommittees, do we have a second to establish these committees as identified here?

- LaTonya, do you...

- You can come off mute and say second. All right, thank you.

- Stacey, did you have a comment?

- I have a question, actually. There was a note that there is a report that's in the SharePoint. Is that the cross...the final cross-RAC report that you were referring to?

- Yes.

- Okay, thank you.

- And for those of you looking, it's less intuitive than you think. It's inside the Resources folder, inside the Resources folder, so two level of Resources folders.

- All right. With that, I think we will go to our last slide, questions, comments, and meeting adjournment, and I'll turn it over to Bryan. And just thank you all for a great conversation this morning.

- All right. Before we adjourn, any final questions? All right. Well, thank you, everybody, today for this great conversation. Appreciate it. Really great on a Monday morning, especially. So just thank you, and I look forward to the developments over the next couple of weeks, as we get into actually developing the report.

I motion to adjourn the meeting. Do I have a second?

- Second.

- Thank you. Vote? You can raise your hands... All right. It looks like we have a majority saying we may now adjourn the meeting. The Meeting 2 for the Midwest RAC is now adjourned, effective 12:35 Eastern time on the 16th of October 2023.

Thank you, everybody, and I look forward to staying in touch over the next couple of weeks. Meeting adjourned.

- Thank you.

- Thank you.