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Identifying and Addressing Priority Education Needs

Central
Regional Advisory Committee

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities and results of the Central Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), authorized under the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA) (Pub. L. 107-279; 20 U.S.C. § 9605). The 10 RACs were established to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Education (Secretary) regarding the educational needs of one of the ten regions served by the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) for input regarding technical assistance activities described in Section 203 of the ETAA and how those needs would be most effectively addressed. The Secretary sought recommendations for nominations to serve on the RAC from the Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, and education stakeholders within each region, and appointed members to the RAC in August 2023. The activities discussed in this report took place from August to November 2023.

The Central RAC primarily focused on three sources for needs sensing: previous research studies, committee member background knowledge and experience, and public comments submitted through the most recent Central RAC public comment survey. The RAC additionally sought input from Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Governing Boards, and other education stakeholders. RAC members were encouraged to share the public comment survey through local networking channels. The goal of these processes was to solicit the views and needs of schools (including public charter schools), educators, parents, teachers, administrators, local education agencies (LEAs), librarians, businesses, state education agencies (SEAs), and other customers within the region regarding the need for the activities described in 20 U.S.C. sections 9564 and 9602 and how those needs would be most effectively addressed. In total, the RAC received 164 public comments, further described in the Data Collection section of this report.

The Central RAC held three virtual meetings to discuss and conduct its needs assessment. During the first meeting, held on September 6, 2023, the RAC reviewed educational data and public comments, deliberated, and made recommendations to address the needs of the region. During the second meeting, held on October 16, 2023, the RAC reviewed additional data, deliberated on the educational needs of their region, and voted on the top five recommended priorities to be included in a final needs assessment report. A final meeting was held on November 14, 2023, to review the subcommittees' written recommendations and vote to approve the final needs assessment report for submission to the Secretary.

The Central RAC recommends prioritizing technical assistance in the following areas:

- **Priority #1:** Support educators in the pipeline and meeting the demand for educators;
- **Priority #2:** Support staff shortages; recruitment and retention;
- **Priority #3:** Support student achievement and growth;
- **Priority #4:** Support student mental health and well-being; and
- **Priority #5:** Support building culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships for schools and families.

The lack of qualified educators has a direct impact on the quality of education that students receive and can exacerbate the learning and opportunity gaps that already exist. Some ways a comprehensive center can support local education agencies (LEAs) in addressing the priority need of meeting the increasing demand for educators are exploring different pathways to teacher certification and helping to strengthen alternative pathways to licensure; developing targeted recruitment strategies and initiatives to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce; collaborating with local colleges and universities; and providing competency-based professional learning opportunities.

The educational system across the Central states collectively feels the impact of unfilled positions, including kitchen staff, paraprofessionals, counselors, and bus drivers. These roles are all part of the educational system and are needed to provide the best education to students. The Central RAC recommends the comprehensive centers provide technical assistance including investigating why teachers/staff leave, why teachers/staff stay, and which states/districts/schools are doing a good job of retaining staff and use these data to produce a best practices document for training and supporting operations staff and paraprofessionals.

Coming out of the disruption to learning associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend of declining student achievement that began prior to the pandemic was further exacerbated. Some ways the comprehensive center can support LEAs in addressing the priority need of students' achievement and growth is by exploring alternative educational models, investigating variability in reteaching/priming expectations in state standards, conducting an analysis of regions to determine replicable successful efforts occurring in states that could be shared, sharing listings of educational service agencies and how they can support districts, providing guidance to states on communicating achievement results with the public, providing local educational agencies (LEAs) organizational support to develop entire systems that allow resources to be focused on student learning, and supporting parent and educator partnerships through other grant programs and how to leverage those findings/activities in the region (e.g., best practices document).

Mental health and well-being in the educational system has emerged as a pressing concern with profound implications for students, teachers, and communities. To ensure that students receive the necessary support, it is crucial the comprehensive centers address important issues, such as alternative pathways for certifications and professions, professional development for teachers, cautious review of AI-based tools, integration with positive behavioral interventions and supports, facilitating health insurance billing, public awareness campaigns and destigmatization, and strengthening community-school-home collaborations.

Building culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships is not just a moral duty but also a strategic imperative for educational excellence and social progress. Some ways the comprehensive center can support LEAs in addressing the priority need of building culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships for schools and families include re-envisioning and restructuring school-centric perspectives that expand upon the definition of parent engagement and partnership, funding research that explores models for mutual accommodation that draw from the funds of knowledge/assets of community and home, preparing all educators (i.e., pre-service, in-service, administrators, counselor, paraprofessionals, etc.) for utilization of effective models of parental engagement and partnership, and

working with policymakers to create state and national guidelines that promote more meaningful levels of family engagement/partnership in schools and classrooms.

Introduction

The Secretary of Education (Secretary) established ten Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), authorized by the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA) (20 U.S.C. sections 9601 et. seq.) and governed by the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (Public Law 92-463). The purpose of the RACs is to collect information on the education needs of each region and how those needs may be addressed through technical assistance activities provided by the Comprehensive Centers Program described in section 203 of the ETAA and other Department technical assistance activities.

RAC members are appointed by the Secretary based on recommendations from Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, and education stakeholders within each region. Central RAC membership is comprised of both Special Government Employees (SGEs) and representatives of organizations or recognizable groups of persons including state education agencies, local education agencies (LEAs), including rural and urban LEAs, institutions of higher education, parents, practicing educators, including classroom teachers, principals, other school administrators, researchers, and individuals from the business community. For a complete list of Central RAC members, please see Appendix B.

Each RAC sought input on regional educational needs from Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Governing Boards, and other education stakeholders in the region and the public. The Central RAC conducted outreach activities such as public comment surveys to obtain input from various constituencies on regional needs and how to address those needs, used statistical data from the Central Regional Profile (Appendix C), and deliberated during public meetings on September 6, 2023, and October 16, 2023. The RAC established five subcommittees to draft a report summarizing the results of the needs assessment and their recommendations. A final public meeting was held on November 14, 2023, to review the subcommittee's recommendations and vote to submit the final educational needs assessment report to the Secretary.

This report is based on the assessment of educational needs within the Central region, which includes the following states: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The analysis and recommendations herein represent the findings of this assessment and the advice of the Central RAC to the Secretary.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the distribution and collection of a public comment survey created by the U.S. Department of Education. The survey was open to the public from August 18 to October 15, 2023. RAC members were encouraged to distribute the survey link through professional and personal networks. The purpose of the public comment survey was to collect a list of needs from educational stakeholders in the Central region, including the REL Central Governing Board. The needs highlighted in the survey responses for the Central region include:

- Supporting strong instruction and academic achievement;
- Supporting specific student populations;
- Supporting teachers, leaders, and school personnel;
- Supporting student and educator well-being; and
- Developing an effective technical assistance response.

A total of 169 people from the Central region responded to the survey. The table below provides additional information about who responded to the survey.

Role	Number of Participants
Administrator	65
Educator	48
Librarian	3
Local education agency (school district)	2
Other education stakeholder	9
Parent	14
School (including public charter schools)	3
Teacher	20
Chief State School Officer	4
Chief Executive Officer	1

The Central RAC had access to regional profiles for each state representing the Central region created by Manhattan Strategy Group (MSG) and based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The regional profile reports included academic and non-academic information for each state in the region. The profile reports provided information about a state’s districts and schools, including the number of operating districts, public schools, charter schools, and private schools, for each jurisdiction in the region. The number of students enrolled in traditional public, charter, and private schools was also included.

Student demographic information was disaggregated to show three to five-year-old enrollment in pre-K and public elementary/secondary enrollment by race/ethnicity. Enrollment numbers by geographical locale (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural) were also provided. Tables were included with data about

English learners, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and students qualifying for special education services.

The profile included tables about student graduation rates, including the total Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for four-year cohorts. Graduation data was also disaggregated for students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, homeless enrolled students, students in foster care, students attending private school, and the race/ethnicity of students.

To capture student academic progress, the most recent results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) were included for fourth- and eighth-grade Mathematics and Reading assessment results.

Non-academic information, such as data related to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions was included. Tables included data about students who brought firearms to school and the percentage of students who reported being bullied, either on school property or electronically.

The regional profiles provide data on available teacher information. This includes the total number of public school teachers and the pupil/teacher ratio as well as the number of teachers in private schools. Data about teacher qualifications (e.g., degree earned and years of experience) was included. Information about teachers who have enrolled and completed a teacher preparation program, including both traditional and non-traditional programs, was also included.

The final section of the profile provided an overview of financial data for each jurisdiction, including revenue sources and current expenditures. Brief information about Title I spending and salaries, wages, and public benefits are also included.

RAC members also had the opportunity to contribute to a data collection board to share publicly accessible data and resources with other members of the RAC. The data collection board was a Word document saved to the Central RAC SharePoint site. The document gave RAC members a space to share and quickly reference resources and provide a rationale for how the resource supports the understanding of a specific education need in the Central region. The data collection board document was created after public Meeting #1 and remained accessible until the committee submitted the Central RAC recommendations report.

Summary of Findings

Central RAC members synthesized information from various RAC members, their constituencies, and public comments (see Appendix D) to determine the highest-priority educational need areas within the region and to recommend strategies to address the needs.

The priority needs, voted on by committee members during a public meeting on October 16, 2023, are presented below:

- **Priority #1:** Educators in the Pipeline and Meeting the Demand for Educators
- **Priority #2:** Staff Shortages; Staff Recruitment and Retention
- **Priority #3:** Student Achievement and Growth
- **Priority #4:** Students' and Staff Mental Health and Well-being
- **Priority #5:** Building Culturally Diverse and Equitable Two-Way Partnerships for Schools and Families

For each need presented below, the committee summarized the needs, their analysis, and generated strategies to meet the needs through technical assistance.

Recommendations

Priority #1: Educators in the Pipeline and Meeting the Demand for Educators

The education model in the United States is dependent on high-quality teachers to deliver instruction. There is substantial research, as noted by the Mid-Atlantic REL, to support the cumulative importance of highly-qualified teachers on students' achievement. Academic achievement is a priority focus for the Central region and if teachers have a direct impact on student learning, then we must ensure the educators of the Central region are well prepared, well supported, and provide all students with high-quality instruction.

Outcomes

A survey was conducted throughout the Central region by members of the RAC. Members sent the survey to stakeholder groups in their State or region to garner input about priority needs in education. Of the 40 comments received regarding the highest priority needs, 23 of them noted teacher shortages, lack of qualified educators, or attracting educators to open positions. These findings echo reports not only from the Central region states, but also from across the nation, which indicate there are far more educator vacancies than qualified candidates for those positions.

For example, in the State of Colorado in the 2021-22 school year, 440 teaching positions remained vacant for the entire school year while an additional 1,103 positions were filled by long-term substitutes or teachers on alternative or emergency licensures (Franco & Patrick, 2023).

Data from the State of Nebraska show teacher shortages are increasing. In 2018-19, there were shortages of teachers in science, math, and language arts in grades five through 12. However, in 2022-23, there were teacher shortages in all grades P-12 for those three subject areas. The Nebraska Teacher Vacancy Survey in 2021-22 was completed by 244 of 261 districts in the State; it found there were 68 teaching vacancies unfilled for the full school year while there were 1,716 teachers not fully endorsed.

A Blue Ribbon Task Force on Students and Teachers was appointed in South Dakota in 2015. Their report, issued in September 2021, noted that data "indicate South Dakota continues to have a teacher shortage" (p. 22) despite the fact the state made significant strides to address teacher pay. The report further states "the teacher shortage in South Dakota is challenging for many districts and is projected to increase" (p. 24). In 2021-22, the South Dakota Report Card showed 72 vacant instructional positions at the beginning of the school year with 298 teachers teaching in content areas without certification.

Another issue that exacerbates the teacher shortage is cost pressures, forces that require higher salaries to maintain a quality teaching pool. Unless teaching salaries remain competitive with non-teaching positions, individuals seek alternative employment options. The RAC speculates this is presumably the case in other states as well. According to the Wyoming State Report Card, teaching wages in Wyoming have declined significantly relative to comparable workers. Wyoming reported 190 teachers using emergency or provisional credentials in 2021-22.

Similarly, teachers make between 3.4% and 35.9% less than other comparable college-educated workers which makes it hard to attract young people to undergraduate programs in education. In fact, teachers in every state make less than other college-educated workers (Allegretto, 2022). Nearly nine in 10 public

school districts struggled to hire teachers heading into the school year, and many potential hires were deterred by low salaries.

A report by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shows that pay is the number one reason teachers consider leaving the teaching profession, and administrators in Missouri agree that pay is the biggest challenge to recruiting teachers.

School districts across the Central region are facing recruiting and retention challenges. In some instances, these shortages are heightened by the fact that fewer students are pursuing undergraduate degrees in education. Kansas is the only state out of the seven Central region states not experiencing a drop in the numbers of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs. Over the past five years, enrollment and completion numbers are down from 26% in North Dakota to 6% in Nebraska. Even more alarming are the numbers over the past nine years where Wyoming has seen a drop of 45% of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Patrick, 2023).

Priority Needs

According to a report on teacher workforce presented to the Missouri State Board of Education in January of 2021, “teacher quality is the single most important school-based variable that influences student achievement”. That same report indicates that pay, low quality candidates, and lack of candidates are all challenges for recruiting teachers.

It is imperative to have the appropriate number of qualified educators serving students, especially when districts are attempting to close post-pandemic learning gaps. Yet, in the 2022-2023 school year, 53% of public schools reported feeling understaffed in August, and 45% of public schools reported still having one or more vacant teaching positions in the month of October. Furthermore, 49% percent of all public schools have not been able to fill vacant teaching positions since the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023).

According to the Regional Profile data, nearly all states across the Central region are showing an increase in state-level shortage trends from pre-pandemic (2018-19) to post-pandemic (2022-23). Moreover, these trends generally show that the shortages encompass all grade levels, and in many cases, more content areas.

Special education is a significant area of need across the Central region. Because of the Federal requirements for special education, many districts find it difficult to meet the specific needs in students’ individualized education plans (IEPs) due to lack of appropriate and trained educators to meet these needs. Key Findings from Spotlights: Teacher Openings During the Coronavirus Pandemic and Challenges and Strategies Recovering from the Pandemic in the *Report on the Condition of Education* from NCES/IES supports this claim across the Central region (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023). In general, higher percentages of public and private schools reported difficulties filling open teaching positions than in 2011–12.

- Between 2012–13 and 2019–20, the number of persons enrolled in and completing traditional teacher preparation programs decreased.

- Forty percent of public schools hiring for open teaching positions in special education in 2020–21 reported having difficulties filling the opening, compared with 17% in 2011–12.
- The number of persons enrolled in traditional teacher preparation programs decreased by 30% between 2012–13 and 2019–20 (from 591,700 to 412,200), and the number of persons completing such programs decreased by 28% between 2012–13 and 2019–20 (from 161,000 to 116,100).

Because of the rural nature of the states in the Central region, many districts are small and lack resources to address these growing challenges related to recruiting and retaining educators. As stated by leaders of Wyoming, South Dakota, and North Dakota in the RAC stakeholder survey this includes the large Native American and tribal populations. For instance, Kirsten Baesler, North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction, notes that hiring Native American teachers in tribal schools is a challenge and that the state requires more programs to address teacher recruitment and retention. Both the Wyoming Governor’s Office and the South Dakota Department of Education identify the needs of Native American students as high priorities, but attracting and retaining teachers to reservation schools can be challenging. The Wyoming Department of Education notes the greatest needs lie in the areas of special education and with Native American students but say the greatest barrier to addressing those needs is teacher and administrator recruitment and retention.

When districts are unable to fully staff schools with highly-qualified educators, class sizes often increase. This makes it more difficult to meet the increasing mental health and learning needs of individual students. Every state in the Central region reports issues with recruiting and retaining competent education professionals, and school districts are seeking support to find creative solutions to meet student needs.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

The lack of qualified educators has a direct impact on the quality of education that students receive and can exacerbate the learning and opportunity gaps that already exist. Some ways the comprehensive center can support LEAs in addressing the priority need of meeting the increasing demand for educators are:

- **Alternative Certification Programs:** Explore different pathways to teacher certification and help to strengthen alternative pathways to licensure, including paraprofessional-to-teacher pathways, internship and apprenticeship programs, and recognizing experience in high need subjects like STEAM and special education toward certification.
- **Educator Recruitment:** Develop targeted recruitment strategies to attract more individuals to the teaching profession, including financial incentives, scholarship programs, and marketing campaigns highlighting the value of teaching. South Dakota Secretary of Education, Dr. Joseph Graves, says that “first and foremost, we need an effort to help people better understand the benefits—spiritual, mental, emotional—of entering the teaching profession”. Develop initiatives to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce, recognizing the importance of representation and culturally responsive teaching in improving educational outcomes for all students. Create a centralized point of contact for each state to assess and address the educator

workforce. Support LEAs and help connect higher education students with current openings, internship and apprenticeship opportunities, including certified and noncertified staff. Assist with marketing to help change the narrative to emphasize the benefits of the profession.

- **Educator Preparation Programs:** Collaborate with local colleges and universities to ensure that teacher preparation programs align with the needs of the region's schools, emphasizing culturally responsive teaching practices and training in special education. Assist higher education in working closely with LEAs to develop programs that prepare graduates to be successful early in their careers, to meet the increasing needs of students including addressing behaviors, mental health, and achievement. Assist LEAs in developing “grow your own” pipeline processes including starting with students as early as 8th grade and assisting non-credentialed employees to get certified.
- **Educator Retention:** Support ways to provide competency-based professional learning opportunities for current educators to expand or add to certifications, perhaps through micro-credentialing. Help develop mentoring and support programs for educators new to the profession, including teaching pedagogy, positive behavior systems, and technology support. Provide support to LEAs to maximize budgets, create efficiencies, and route resources to instructional support to retain high-quality educators in the profession.

Priority #2: Staff Shortages; Staff Recruitment and Retention

The Central RAC primarily focused on three sources for needs sensing: previous research studies, committee member background knowledge and experience, and public comments submitted through a public comment survey. An outcome of the need sensing activities was a concern about the lack of access to a qualified workforce. Staff recruitment and retention issues were also identified.

Outcomes

Additional evidence for the need of support with staff recruitment and retention includes workforce needs identified during professional memberships meetings, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and identified by multiple state governors. Discussions during the Central RAC Public Meeting #1 were about the lack of qualified staff to meet the needs of students. These discussions focused on all staff, from custodians, bus drivers, food service, and mental health staff to teachers and building/district leaders.

One hundred and sixty-nine stakeholders participated in the Central RAC public comment survey and 27 of the respondents mentioned staffing needs in their submissions. These respondents represent a diverse educational stakeholder perspective:

- 10 administrators
- Seven teachers/educators
- Four other school staff (e.g., librarians)
- Four other stakeholders
- Three Chief State School Officers

Priority Needs

Public education faces threats from many arenas, including issues arising from a global pandemic that has upended much of our traditional understanding of obstacles to academic success. These prevailing challenges require new and innovative responses from knowledgeable and inventive people. In fact, the world is facing a stable of unique concerns that require fresh and original solutions. Therefore, the major issues facing our educational system, students, teachers, and communities today are staff shortages, recruitment, and retention.

The educational system across the Central states collectively feels the impact of unfilled positions, including kitchen staff, paraprofessionals, counselors, and bus drivers. These roles are a part of the educational system and are needed to provide the best education to students. There is a great impact on students learning if we do not have the capacity to support these roles. Special education services are not being provided because of a lack of support staff (i.e., speech therapists, etc.). Support staff are the first line of socio-emotional support for students, families, and communities. Support staff are not only important to our educational system but essential to learning. In Nebraska, state level Commercial Driver's License (CDL) endorsements indicate a shortage of bus drivers.

According to analysis of teacher data by Patrick (2023) six of the seven Central states saw a negative change in enrollment and completion of teacher preparation programs over the past five years. This negative change ranged from -6% to -26%.

In addition to staff shortages, recruitment and retention of teachers and support staff is impacting our educational system in the Central region. Principals are the instructional leaders in a school building, and there is a shortage of school building leadership. Education decision makers in Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota addressed their concerns about mobility and attrition among educational leaders through a report prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences in 2020 (Meyer et al., 2020). In 2019, a study was conducted addressing teacher retention, mobility, and attrition in Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota. This study concluded that 82% of teachers stay in their current positions, 8% move to other positions within their district, and 10% leave education entirely. It is imperative to discover why this 10% is leaving education and how to retain this group of teachers (Meyer et al., 2019). Surveys for educators leaving the profession and surveys for educators staying in the profession would help with this discovery. Additionally, comparing salary data between non-certified jobs and industry positions would be beneficial.

Efforts to recruit and retain staff are not applied consistently, which makes it difficult to identify best practices and scale efforts. A key finding in a study that focused on teacher pay, conducted and updated by the Economic Policy Institute in 2021, is that teachers are paid less than their non-teacher, college-educated counterparts. Another finding in a study conducted by IES through REL Central focusing on mentorship programs stated that lack of funding, lack of time, and lack of stipends were the most common identified barriers to implementing adequate mentoring programs in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota (DeCesare et al., 2016).

Technical Assistance Recommendations

The Central RAC recommends that educational comprehensive centers and other U.S. Department of Education technical assistance efforts focus on the following actions:

- Investigate why teachers/staff are leaving through analysis of exit surveys.
- Investigate why teachers/staff stay.
- Investigate why teachers are unhappy by analyzing teacher strike trends across the nation.
- Investigate which states/districts/schools are doing a good job of retaining staff and create a best practices document for training and supporting operations staff and paraprofessionals.
- Investigate which states/districts/schools retain classroom teachers and create a best practices document for training and supporting teaching staff.

Priority #3: Student Achievement and Growth

Student achievement will be a perennial focus for the Central region as achievement represents learning and learning is one of, if not, **the** promise we make to our society for supporting the education of our public. Coming out of the disruption to learning associated with the COVID-19 pandemic we find that the trend of declining student achievement that began prior to the pandemic has been further exacerbated thereafter. That said, the Central region has fared the pandemic better than most other regions – especially in the subject of mathematics. However, there is significant variability in state level performance within the region and persistent variability in outcomes for different student groups where we find learning gaps have, on average, grown. This gives some indication that the impact of the pandemic varied not only between states, but within state student populations and their associated families.

Outcomes

A total of 29 public comments aligned to the priority of achievement were thematically analyzed. Comments were made by various stakeholder groups ranging from teachers (15 comments or 50%), administrators (12 comments or 40%), other education stakeholders (2 comments or 6.7%), and parents (1 comment or 3.3%).

- **Curriculum Reform Needs:** Literacy Focus, Common National Formative Assessments, and Engage Parents (10 Comments from 5 Administrators, 2 Teachers, 2 Parents, and 1 Educational Stakeholder)
- **Student Engagement:** Increase via Career Technical Education and Struggles with Attendance (8 Comments from 5 Administrators and 3 Teachers,)
- **Student Needs:** Socio-emotional Learning for All Students, and Additional Supports for English Learners (5 Comments from 3 Administrators, 1 Teacher, and 1 Educational Stakeholder)
- **Leaving Students Behind:** Impact of the Pandemic, Social Promotion, and Common Core Aligned Standards with Limited Reteaching (6 Comments from 4 Teachers, 2 Administrators)

Priority Needs

According to the NAEP Performance Trend for the Central Region (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022), in the two years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, declines were noted in the average reading scale score for the Central region for Grade 4 and 8 students, with an average 2017 to 2019 decline of 0.8% and 1.3%, respectively, by grade. The variability around this trend within the region between 2017 and 2019 found that in Grade 4, 57% of states (4 of 7) exhibited a decline and 43% of states (3 of 7) maintained their average scale score. For Grade 8, 100% of states experienced a decline in their average scale score during this period. In addition to the reading average trending lower, significant declines were also noted in both the percentage of students performing at the basic and above level, as well as the proficient or above level. Specifically, in Grade 4, the basic and above percentage for the region declined by 2.8%— with a maximum decline of 7.2% and a minimum decline of 0%—and the proficient or above percentage declined by 2.7%—with a maximum decline of 8.1% and a minimum decline of 0%. At Grade 8, the basic and above percentage for the region declined by 4.9%—with a maximum decline of 7.5% and a minimum decline of 2.5%—and the proficient or above percentage declined by 8.8%—with a maximum decline of 13.5% and a minimum decline of 3.0%.

Following the disrupted learning associated with the pandemic, all states exhibited a decline in average scale scores in both Grades 4 and 8. Average reading scale score declines for the region from 2019 to 2022 were 1.5% in Grade 4 and 1.7% in Grade 8, with maximum declines of 2.3% and 2.7%, respectively. Like the 2017 to 2019 period, 2019 to 2022 found significant declines in proficiency rates. Specifically, in Grade 4, the basic and above percentage for the region declined by 5.7%—with a maximum decline of 9.1% and a minimum decline of 2.7%—and the proficient or above percentage declined by 8.7%—with a maximum decline of 11.8% and a minimum decline of 5.0%. For Grade 8, the basic and above percentage for the region declined by 6.3%—with a maximum decline of 9.5% and a minimum decline of 1.4%—and the proficient or above percentage declined by 15.1%—with a maximum decline of 26.3% and a minimum decline of 3.1%.



Source: NAEP 2022 Reading Assessment.

Math average scale scores both prior to and following the learning disruptions caused by the global pandemic are higher than average scale scores for reading in Grades 4 and 8. Similar to reading, declines were also noted in the average math scale scores for the region in both Grade 4 and 8 with an average decline of .05% for both grades (i.e., 1.29 point decline at Grade 4 and 1.57 point decline at Grade 8)

from 2017 to 2019. There was less variability in the region regarding performance on the Grade 4 NAEP Math Assessment with 86% of states seeing a decline and only one state (14%) showing an average scale score increase of one point. On the Grade 8 NAEP Math Assessment, 57% of states (4 of 7) declined, one state increased their average scale score, and one state maintained their average scale score from 2017 to 2019. Like reading, declines were also noted for both grades in the percentage of students identified as basic or above (i.e., Grade 4 = -1.0% and Grade 8 = -2.2%) and proficient or above (i.e., Grade 4 = -3.0% and Grade 8 = -2.7%). There was also significant variability around these averages with a Grade 4 maximum decline in the percent of students identified as basic or above of 3.7% and a minimum decline of 0%, and, for Grade 8, the maximum state level decline for basic and above was 4.1% and the minimum decline was 0%. At the proficient or above level the maximum decline was 9.8% and the minimum decline was an increase of 6.7%.

Though the trend for the Central region prior to the pandemic was one of declining performance on the NAEP Math Assessment, the disrupted learning between the 2019 and 2022 assessments resulted in all states declining in average scale scores (Grade 4 = -3.7 points or -1.5% and Grade 8 = -7.7 points or a decline of 2.7% from 2019 scores) with maximum declines of five points (Grade 4) and seven points (Grade 8) and minimum declines of two points (Grade 4) and one point (Grade 8). Similarly, significant declines were also noted in the percentage of students identified as basic or above (Grade 4 = -5.2% and Grade 8 = -9.6%) and students identified as proficient or above (Grade 4 = -8.7% and Grade 8 = -15.1%). Thus, declines in NAEP performance in both reading and math were present before the pandemic and significantly more so thereafter.



Source: NAEP 2022 Mathematics Assessment.

In addition to the variations seen between the Central region states, the RAC also notes significant student group level variability within states as expressed in changes to the gaps between student groups. On average, racial gaps widened in both Grade 4 and 8 with the exception being the gap between white and African American students in Grade 8. The gap associated with socioeconomics declined significantly in each state in the Central region for Grade 4 and increased in only two states in Grade 8. Together these findings provide some evidence there were unique pandemic impacts associated with race beyond socioeconomics.

Achievement Gaps by Race and Lunch Status between 2019 and 2022 in Math by Grade						
State	Gr4			Gr8		
	White - African American Gap	White - Hispanic Gap	Full-Pay vs FRL	White - African American Gap	White - Hispanic Gap	Full-Pay vs FRL
Colorado	-5	4	3	0	7	-1
Kansas	4	3	-4	-2	0	-1
Missouri	8	3	-8	5	-2	0
Nebraska	-1	6	-6	-5	1	0
North Dakota	12	1	-2	-5	9	5
South Dakota	-3	-4	-3	N/A	8	-2
Wyoming	N/A	-2	-16	N/A	-2	4
Region Average	2.50	1.57	-5.14	-1.4	3.00	0.71

Source: RAC member’s data analysis of NAEP 2022 Mathematics Assessment.

Variability in reading performance outcomes within states by student groups finds that, based on the average change within the region, learning gaps grew larger in reading relative to math. However, like findings from the math assessment, the gap associated with socioeconomics (i.e., between Full Pay and students qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunches) declined or stayed the same in all states in Grade 4 and declined or stayed the same in 71.4% (i.e., 5/7) of Central region states. However, on average, race-ethnicity gaps increased significantly in Grade 4 and to a lesser extent in Grade 8.

Achievement Gaps by Race and Lunch Status between 2019 and 2022 in Reading by Grade						
State	Gr4			Gr8		
	White - African American Gap	White - Hispanic Gap	Full-Pay vs FRL	White - African American Gap	White - Hispanic Gap	Full-Pay vs FRL
Colorado	7	3	-3	-5	-1	0
Kansas	1	6	-1	-1	1	-2
Missouri	12	1	-3	7	1	0
Nebraska	3	4	-4	-1	2	5
North Dakota	16	3	-4	6	-3	-1
South Dakota	N/A	-8	-8	N/A	0	-3
Wyoming	N/A	2	0	N/A	-1	3
Region Average	7.80	1.57	-3.29	1.2	-0.14	0.29

Source: RAC member’s data analysis of NAEP 2022 Mathematics Assessment.

NAEP Performance Trend for the Central Regional Relative to Other Regions

The following tables compare NAEP testing from 2019 (Pre-Pandemic Disruption) and 2022 (Post-Pandemic Disruption). The data represents: 1) the average place value move of the states that make up each region for both Grades 4 and 8 and when averaged across both grades; 2) the maximum and minimum place value changes for the states within each region to give some indication of the variability that exists within regions by both Grades 4 and 8 and when averaged across both grades. Positive numbers are associated with national rank improvement and negative numbers represent declines in national rankings of NAEP performance. The graph is sorted by the average place value change of the Grade 4 and Grade 8 averages.

NAEP Math Performance

Findings for NAEP Math assessment indicate that the Central region performed better than all but three other regions. Specifically, we see that an average state within the Central region improved their performance relative to the performance of all other states, the Department of Defense, and the District of Columbia by 1.71 places. These results were largely predicated by the performance of Grade 4 students where the average state ranking improvement within the Central region from the 2019 to 2022 assessment was 2.71 positions. The 2019 average rank of states within the Central region on the Grade 4 mathematics assessment was approximately 19th (i.e., 19.14)—with a max ranking of 7th (Wyoming) and a minimum ranking of 35th (Missouri) —versus 2022 result rankings that found the average state within the Central region to be 16th—with a max ranking of 2nd (Wyoming, only behind the Department of Defense) and a minimum ranking of 36th (Missouri). On the Grade 8 assessment, the average ranking

improvement was 0.71 positions. The 2019 average rank of states within the Central region on the Grade 8 mathematics assessment was approximately 18th (i.e., 17.57) —with a max ranking of 7th (South Dakota) and a minimum ranking of 27th (Missouri)—versus 2022 result rankings that found the average state within the Central region to be 17th—with a max ranking of 5th (South Dakota) and a minimum ranking of 31st (Kansas).

		Math Change by Region								
		Averages			G4		G8		Average	
Rank	Region	G4	G8	Average	Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min
1	West	2.75	6.00	4.38	6	1	16	0	9	0.5
2	Midwest	6.14	0.71	3.43	19	-11	10	-6	13.5	-8
3	Central	2.71	0.71	1.71	8	-8	8	-6	8	-5
4	Southeast	1.83	1.17	1.50	12	-10	5	-3	8.5	-5
5	Northwest	-1.40	2.60	0.60	6	-8	8	-6	6	-3.5
6	Southwest	0.00	-0.40	-0.20	6	-2	7	-10	5	-6
7	Appalachia	-3.75	-1.75	-2.75	3	-17	1	-3	2	-10
8	Northeast & Islands	-3.50	-2.13	-2.81	2	-12	6	-9	1.5	-8
9	Mid-Atlantic	-9.40	-7.00	-8.20	-5	-20	-1	-13	-3	-15

Source: RAC member’s data analysis of NAEP 2022 Mathematics Assessment.

NAEP Reading Performance

In Reading, the Central region only performed better than four other regions (i.e., Northeast & Islands, Northwest, Appalachia, and the Mid-Atlantic). This finding is based on the observation that the average state within the Central region declined just over half a rank (i.e., -0.57) from 2019 to 2022. This result is based largely on minimal increases in Grade 4 reading rankings and an average ranking decline of 1.57 places in Grade 8. The 2019 average rank of states within the Central region on the Grade 4 reading assessment was approximately 18th (18.14)—with a max ranking of 4th (Wyoming) and a minimum ranking of 35th (Missouri)—versus 2022 result rankings that found the average state within the Central region to have remained at approximately 18th (17.71%)—with a max ranking of 3rd (Wyoming) and a minimum ranking of 38th (Missouri). The 2019 average rank of states within the Central region on the Grade 8 reading assessment was 23rd—with a max ranking of 9th (Colorado) and a minimum ranking of 39th (South Dakota) —versus 2022 result rankings that found the average state within the Central region to be approximately 25th (i.e., 24.57) —with a max ranking of 8th (Colorado) and a minimum ranking of 40th (Kansas).

		Reading Change by Region								
		Averages			G4		G8		Average	
Rank	Region	G4	G8	Average	Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min
1	Southwest	5.20	2.20	3.70	16	-6	7	-6	11.5	-6
2	West	0.50	6.50	3.50	8	-6	15	-2	9	0
3	Southeast	6.67	-2.33	2.17	18	-7	12	-16	10	-9
4	Midwest	0.71	1.00	0.86	17	-17	12	-5	10.5	-7.5
5	Central	0.43	-1.57	-0.57	4	-3	26	-13	13	-7
6	Northeast & Islands	-4.00	0.29	-1.86	4	-19	22	-24	7	-21.5
7	Northwest	-3.20	-2.40	-2.80	7	-19	4	-15	3	-12
8	Appalachia	-8.25	-0.75	-4.50	-2	-25	12	-7	-2.5	-6.5
9	Mid-Atlantic	-5.60	-4.20	-4.90	1	-15	2	-8	0	-11.5

Source: RAC member’s data analysis of NAEP 2022 Reading Assessment.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

Some ways the comprehensive center can support LEAs in addressing this priority need are:

- Begin exploring alternative educational models that reduce reliance on human resources and leverage advancements in technology (e.g., algorithm-based technology primarily used in social media applications that could be leveraged to provide students learning content in alignment with their interests or other preferences for instruction or instructors, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality).
- Investigate variability in reteaching/priming expectations in state standards within and between regions to determine if these are contributing to widening gaps between student groups (e.g., proficient and non-proficient students).
- Conduct a between and within analysis of regions to determine replicable successful efforts occurring in states that could be shared.
- Share listings of educational service agencies and how they can support districts, especially those in rural areas.
- Provide guidance to states on communicating achievement results with the public when these results are congruent or incongruent with NAEP results (e.g., state assessments show decline and NAEP shows an increase for the state).
- Provide local educational agencies (LEAs) organizational support to develop entire systems that allow resources to be focused on student learning (e.g., budgeting, scheduling, resourcing, and long-term planning).
- Support parent and educator partnerships through other grant programs and how to leverage those findings/activities in the region (e.g., best practices document).

Priority #4: Students' and Staff Mental Health and Well-being

Outcomes

Multiple pieces of evidence strongly support the prioritization of mental health and well-being in education. Public comment surveys conducted among stakeholders including parents, educators, state-level educational leaders, and community members consistently emphasize the pressing need for increased mental health support within schools. These surveys serve as a clear reflection of the ground-level demand for improved mental health services. Of the responses to the public comment survey for the Central region, 22 of 54 responses overall identified students' mental health and well-being as a priority. More specifically, of the disaggregated subcategory of "Supporting Student and Educator Well-being," mental health supports were identified in eight of 10 responses.

Additionally, research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the repercussions of such experiences underscores the necessity of creating safe and supportive learning environments for students. Trauma-informed studies reveal that students facing adverse circumstances require specialized care and attention to thrive academically and emotionally.

The escalating demand for mental health services becomes apparent when analyzing data across the last five years. An undeniable increase in the number of students seeking access to mental health supports highlights the growing urgency to address this issue in educational settings.

Further, the commitment of Federal grants to educational organizations for the purpose of enhancing mental health support is a testament to the wider recognition of the pressing importance of this matter. These grants provide financial backing and validation for the pursuit of mental health initiatives within the education sector.

Alarming, trends in suicide rates among young individuals, particularly those aged 12-24, have shown a significant and troubling increase. This surge in suicide rates points to an urgent need for intervention and highlights the life-or-death nature of prioritizing mental health in education. These sources shed light on the nuanced needs and preferences of students and reinforce the urgency of addressing mental health issues in education.

Priority Needs

Mental health and well-being in the educational system has emerged as a pressing concern with profound implications for students, teachers, and communities. The foundational level of safety and the unmet needs of students prompts the need to prioritize mental health in education.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs emphasizes the importance of a foundational level of safety before individuals can engage in higher-order thinking and learning. A student struggling with their mental health is unlikely to succeed academically if their basic needs for safety and security are not met. Ensuring students' mental well-being is paramount for effective education, as is that of teachers.

The departure of teachers and staff from the educational field is partly linked to the unmet needs of students. Often, these unmet needs can contribute to disruptive and even dangerous classroom environments. Overworked and under-supported educators struggle to meet the growing demand for mental health support in their classrooms. The lack of access to mental health care significantly impacts the classroom environment, contributing to burnout and attrition among teaching professionals.

Many communities face an alarming disparity between the need for mental health care and the availability of services. Waitlists for mental health care can stretch for months, often pushing individuals towards inpatient care due to unmet needs. This shortage has far-reaching implications for students' well-being.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

The mental health and well-being of students are essential components of their overall development. To ensure that students receive the necessary support, it is crucial for the U.S. Department of Education comprehensive centers to consider various recommendations that address this important issue, such as:

- **Alternative Pathways for Certifications and Professions.** One significant way to bolster student mental health is by creating alternative pathways for certifications and professions in education based mental health care. Providing pathways for individuals to become certified in this domain is key to addressing the growing demand for support. By providing diverse and accessible routes

to become mental health professionals, we can expand the workforce and better meet the needs of students.

- **Professional Development for Teachers.** Investing in professional development for educators is paramount. This extends beyond traditional academic training and focuses on equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary to support students' mental health. Such training not only benefits students but also their families and the well-being of the teachers themselves. Self-care and effective support strategies must be part of teacher development programs.
- **Cautious Review of AI-Based Tools.** While technological advancements have the potential to assist in identifying and addressing mental health concerns, the use of AI-based tools should be approached with caution. Relying on these tools before they have been thoroughly vetted can pose risks. It is imperative for the Department to establish rigorous standards for AI in mental health to ensure the safety and well-being of students.
- **Integration with PBIS.** Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) offer a framework that can be integral to mental health support within educational settings. By integrating mental health services with PBIS, schools can create a holistic approach that addresses both behavioral and emotional needs. This alignment enhances the effectiveness of support systems.
- **Facilitating Health Insurance Billing.** Access to mental health services can be significantly improved by providing schools with the capacity to engage with health insurance and Medicaid. This facilitates easier access to care for students, wrap around care, as well as providing districts with valuable resources to fund mental health programs.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns and Destigmatization.** Promoting public awareness and destigmatization of mental health issues is a critical step. Many regions struggle with openly discussing mental health and the supports available. Public campaigns can contribute to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health, fostering a more supportive environment.
- **Grants and System Integration.** The Department should focus on ensuring that communities and schools are working in tandem with one another to support students and families. Leveraging Stop School Violence and other similar grants or programs can aid in creating a robust system that identifies what works and what is similar across different regions, promoting collaboration and shared best practices.
- **Sustainability Beyond ESSER Funds.** With Emergency Relief funds (ESSER) playing a pivotal role in funding mental health programs, it is essential to plan for the sustainability of these initiatives once the funds expire. The Department must work to establish long-term strategies and funding mechanisms to maintain and grow these programs.
- **Community-School-Home Collaboration.** Lastly, an overarching theme is the need to move from siloing mental health support within a school or district. Instead, the Department should prioritize creating a seamless thread that connects the community, school, and home. This collaborative approach is essential for ensuring that students receive consistent and comprehensive care that considers their entire ecosystem. Focusing support on the home will wrap support from the home to the school and back to the home.

In conclusion, these recommendations provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the mental health and well-being of students. By adopting these strategies, the U.S. Department of Education can play a pivotal role in creating a nurturing and supportive environment that enables students to thrive academically and emotionally.

Priority #5: Building Culturally Diverse and Equitable Two-Way Partnerships for Schools and Families

Outcomes

In a culturally diverse world characterized by rapidly evolving social dynamics, the education system plays a pivotal role in nurturing an inclusive, equitable society. Using a needs sensing approach, the Central RAC uncovered the compelling need for schools to foster equitable two-way partnerships with families of all cultural backgrounds.

The Central RAC began this investigation by delving into the intricate mosaic of our school communities. The diverse array of cultural backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences among our students and their families was abundantly clear. For example, the recent report, *The Condition of Education at a Glance* (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023) showed a rapid increase in percentages of students enrolling in school from the racial/ethnic groups of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and those families reporting to be from two or more races. Additionally, the report shows an increase in the number of students aged 3-21 receiving special education services in public school. This diversity reflects the globalized world in which we live and underscores the crucial importance of acknowledging and embracing these differences.

As our exploration continued, we unearthed disparities in student outcomes deeply rooted in cultural and socioeconomic factors. Students from historically marginalized backgrounds faced barriers that hindered their academic achievement in schools across the United States. Across grade levels, NAEP Math and Reading scores were lower for English learner (EL) students than non-EL students, and lower for students with disabilities than peers without disabilities. Addressing these disparities is essential for creating equitable educational outcomes. The power of language emerged as an invaluable bridge for building connections between schools and families. Our data showed the effects of existing language barriers, and illuminated the proven impact of educational outcomes when non-English-speaking families are provided with language support services.

The pivotal importance of cultural competency and sensitivity is at the forefront of our findings. Enhancing cultural awareness, respect, and understanding among educators and staff is necessary for the creation of an environment where all families feel valued and respected. Public comment surveys conducted among stakeholders in the Central region, including parents, educators, state-level educational leaders, and community members, consistently emphasized the pressing need for culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships between schools and families. These surveys clearly reflect the ground-level demand for improved school-family partnerships. Of the responses to the public comment survey for the Central region, 21 out of 54 responses identified support for students from culturally diverse backgrounds and for students with disabilities as a needed priority. Current research and attention to needs-sensing materials reveal the pressing needs faced by our school communities, the barriers they face, and aspirations they are inspired by. Building culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships is not just a moral duty but also a strategic imperative for educational excellence

and social progress. It is a commitment to nurturing an inclusive educational environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive, and it is the path forward towards a brighter, more equitable future for all. Consequently, our report urges decisive action.

Priority Needs

At this transformational time for our country, no population is crying out for change more than our children. We have a moral obligation to address the inequality that still plagues underserved public schools, from our inner cities to our neglected rural communities. While in many ways the need seems endless, that only amplifies the call for some degree of equality for all children. The Central RAC believes that young people, who bear no responsibility for their life circumstances, fundamentally deserve to begin from the same educational starting line as all their peers. We insist that equity in education is impossible without appreciation of the richness of the culture and language that animate the learner's daily lived experiences and everyday language. In the strongest possible terms, we advocate for the implementation of practices and allocation of resources to support the capacity development of schools and communities to serve families equitably.

The development of more robust school-family partnerships is an important priority in the fight for equity in education. For example, new research on disability-related issues continues to bring changes in Federal and state policies and procedures, such that all schools must stay current on the changes and maintain staff development, providing the latest in important information and training to families and youth. The Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP) *Guidance to Help Schools Support Students with Disabilities and Avoid Disparities in the Use of Discipline* was just released in 2022, providing critical information schools and families must have to support all stakeholders (including teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, administrators, LEAs, SEAs, and families) in implementing this guidance. It is information such as this that schools and families must always stay abreast of to be the trusted resource in their states when assisting families.

Another important aspect of this priority is assisting educators, families, and youth in learning how to successfully navigate and access necessary services and supports. It is the role and responsibility of the schools and families working collaboratively to provide support, so school communities, families, and youth build their confidence and advocacy skills. Every child can manifest their dreams regardless of demographics or disability when schools and families work collaboratively to provide critical resources based on evidence-based practices to each child, parent, and family. Caring, highly-trained professionals can change the trajectory of their lives.

Inequities in the delivery of services to traditionally underserved populations were highlighted during COVID-19, when public education was delivered remotely. While it was disruptive and vexing for every family, it was particularly challenging for families with limited financial resources, equipment, and internet access. Students receiving special education services were especially vulnerable. Many families juggled more than one student sharing computer time, parents trying to work from home, and navigating remote lessons and services that had never been tested for effectiveness. Behavior plans were abandoned and the social-emotional health of the students (and their families) was significantly impacted. It is widely recognized that our whole nation of students lost valuable learning time and regressed, but the impact on students receiving special education during this time was catastrophic and

was truly devastating for our most vulnerable and marginalized youth. The development of a young child is profoundly influenced by experience.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

For communities, families, and students, one of the most important pillars of student success is how well our educational systems establish strong relational trust that leads to student academic success. The role the family plays in a child's cultural and linguistic development has been a longstanding focus of educational, anthropological, and sociological research. Schools struggle to develop strong educational partnerships and engage parents and caregivers beyond school events, parent-teacher conferences, meetings, or literacy nights, leaving us with few concrete models for addressing the needs of schools and communities.

Lack of understanding by decisionmakers and educators alike on how parents/caregivers can be equal partners in learning often results in actions reflective of a deficit perspective, where instruction may be limited to practices grounded in research and theory that has not acknowledged the richness of the culture and language already present within the learner's daily experiences and language. These interactions form the foundation of a learner's cognitive belief system regarding how the "self" fits into new systems of learning. Success in school depends heavily on the extent to which the educational system welcomes and includes parents not only in decision making, but also in seeing their multi-faceted dimensions of culture, language, and community history as part of the fabric of all that we call school. Transforming schools for a new generation will require a reconceptualization and reconstruction of our thinking and action.

The following are key technical assistance recommendations for comprehensive centers to build culturally diverse and equitable two-way partnerships for schools and families in the Central RAC moving forward:

- A focus on re-envisioning and restructuring school-centric perspective that expands upon the definition of parent engagement and partnership.
- Funding research that explores models for mutual accommodation that draws from the funds of knowledge/assets of community and home.
- Prepare all educators (pre-service, in-service, administrators, counselor, paraprofessionals etc.) for utilization of effective models of parental engagement and partnership.
- Work with policymakers to create state and national guidelines that promote more meaningful levels of family engagement/partnership in schools and classrooms.

Meaningful, two-way school-family partnerships begin from the idea that no single picture of a family exists, building towards the establishment of relational trust that fosters student achievement. Equitable schools honor all families by allowing each to define their own place and offer their unique contributions within their community and educational environment. For children to move forward in this world full of stresses, conflicts, and tragedy, schools must move toward understanding every family, knowing that each will be present in their own way.

Conclusion

Through the review of public comments, regional profile reports, and previous studies, the Central RAC recommends that educational comprehensive centers and other U.S. Department of Education technical assistance efforts focus on five priority areas in the Central region.

- **Priority #1: Educators in the Pipeline and Meeting the Demand for Educators**
 - Explore different pathways to teacher certification and help to strengthen alternative pathways to licensure.
 - Develop targeted recruitment strategies to attract more individuals to the teaching profession, including financial incentives, scholarship programs, and marketing campaigns highlighting the value of teaching.
 - Collaborate with local colleges and universities to ensure teacher preparation programs align with the needs of the region's schools, emphasizing culturally responsive teaching practices and training in special education.
 - Support ways to provide competency-based professional learning opportunities for current educators to expand or add to certifications, perhaps through micro-credentialing.
- **Priority #2: Staff Shortages; Staff Recruitment and Retention**
 - Investigate why teachers/staff are leaving through analysis of exit surveys.
 - Investigate why teachers/staff stay.
 - Investigate why teachers are unhappy by analyzing teacher strike trends across the nation.
 - Investigate which states/districts/schools are doing a good job of retaining staff and create a best practices document for training and supporting operations staff and paraprofessionals.
 - Investigate which states/districts/schools retain classroom teachers and create a best practices document for training and supporting teaching staff.
- **Priority #3: Student Achievement and Growth**
 - Exploring alternative educational models that reduce reliance on human resources and leverage advancements in technology.
 - Investigate variability in reteaching/priming expectations in state standards within and between regions to determine if these are contributing to widening gaps between student groups.
 - Conduct a between and within analysis of regions to determine replicable successful efforts occurring in states that could be shared.
 - Share listings of educational service agencies and how they can support districts – especially those in rural areas.
 - Provide guidance to states on communicating achievement results with the public when these results are congruent or incongruent with NAEP results.

- Provide LEAs organizational support to develop entire systems that allow resources to be focused on student learning.
- Support parent and educator partnerships through other grant programs and how to leverage those findings/activities in the region.
- **Priority #4: Students' and Staff Mental Health and Well-being**
 - Create alternative pathways for certifications and professions in education based mental healthcare.
 - Invest in professional development for educators.
 - Establish rigorous standards for AI-based tools in mental health.
 - Integrate mental health services with PBIS.
 - Facilitate health insurance billing.
 - Promote public awareness of mental health issues.
 - Provide grants that promote school and community systems integration.
 - Establish long-term funding mechanisms to grow and maintain mental health programs.
 - Promote community, school, and home collaboration.
- **Priority #5: Building Culturally Diverse and Equitable Two-Way Partnerships for Schools and Families**
 - Re-envisioning and restructuring school-centric perspective that expands upon the definition of parent engagement and partnership.
 - Funding research that explores models for mutual accommodation that draws from the funds of knowledge/assets of community and home.
 - Prepare all educators (pre-service, in-service, administrators, counselor, paraprofessionals etc.) for utilization of effective models of parental engagement and partnership.
 - Work with policymakers to create state and national guidelines that promote more meaningful levels of family engagement/partnership in schools and classrooms.

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Appendix A. Chart of Nominated, Recommended, and Serving RAC Members

Number of Individuals Nominated, Recommended, and Serving on the Central RAC

Region	Nominated	Recommended by the U.S. Department of Education	Declined	Resigned	Accepted, Serving
Central	17	12	0	0	12

Appendix B. List of RAC Members

Central RAC members represented local and state education agencies; institutions of higher education; parents; practicing educators, including classroom teachers; and organizations serving youth, educators, or both. Members include:

Regional Chair

- Ms. Cat Palmer, Assessment Supervisor, Wyoming Department of Education

RAC Members

- Dr. Jacquelyn Eidson, Executive Director of the National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute; Business Faculty for the University of Kansas School of Graduate and Professional Studies
- Ms. Paige Fenton Hughes, Superintendent, Converse County School District I
- Dr. Allison Fleetwood, Doctoral Program Adjunct Professor; Theatre Department Chair/ Theatre Teacher/ Director, Evangel University
- Mr. Matt Good, Teacher – Debate, Advanced Debate, Competitive Dramatics, and English, Lee’s Summit West High School
- Mr. Glenn Hancock, Director of Research Evaluation and Assessment, Rockwood School District
- Dr. Socorro Herrera, Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction / Executive Director, Center for Intercultural Multilingual Advocacy (CIMA), Kansas State University, College of Education
- Mr. Mark E. Miller, Mathematics Teacher and Department Chair, Cheyenne Mountain Junior High School
- Dr. Larianne Polk, Chief Administrator, Educational Service Unit 7
- Ms. Monica Waltman, Ed.S., Director of Special Services, Douglas School District 51-1
- Ms. Michelle Williers, Executive Director of PEAK Parent Center, Parent Training & Information Center for the State of Colorado, Parent Technical Assistance Center for Region D

Appendix C. Central Regional Profile (Comprehensive)

The following profile shows recent data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education for the Central Region, which includes Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Data for each state is included along with high-level data comparing information across the regions. The following topic areas are included:

- Information about Districts and Schools
- Student Enrollment Information
- Graduation Information
- Student Academic Information
- Student Non-Academic Information
- Teacher Information
- Teacher Qualifications
- Teacher Shortages
- Financial Resources
- Resources

Note that data includes the most recent tables available in July 2023. In some instances, data have not been disaggregated by jurisdiction so national data have been included as a reference point. Where appropriate, Reflection Questions have been provided for consideration.

Overall Reflection Questions

- What is your overall reaction to the data presented?
 - *Is it what you expected?*
 - *If it was not what you expected, what surprised you?*
- What other data do you need to help you better understand the needs in your jurisdiction or region?
- Are the data available at the state level or do you have access to this data through another vehicle?
- How can the needs assessment help you attain this data?
- What do you believe are the top priorities facing your jurisdiction/region?
- Why do you believe these are the top priorities facing your jurisdiction?
- What input would you like to hear from other stakeholders?
- How will you collect that input?

Information about Central Districts and Schools

Totals by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Operating Districts (2020-21) ¹	Total Number of Operating Public Schools (2020-21) ¹	Total Number of Charter Schools (2020-21) ²	Total Number of Private Schools (Fall 2019)
Colorado	272	1,927	262	360
Kansas	335	1,310	9	220
Missouri	564	2,444	76	640
Nebraska	279	1,086	0	190
North Dakota	221	488	0	60
South Dakota	166	706	0	80
Wyoming	60	364	5	40

Note 1: Profiles were prepared using the most recent publicly available data. The most recent set of private school data provided was fall 2019, whereas the tables used for reporting the districts and public/charter school data were updated for the 2020-21 school year.

Note 2: Operating schools/districts include all those providing services at the start of the reported school year.

Student Enrollment Information

Jurisdiction	Total Public School Enrollment (Fall 2019)	Public PreK-8 Enrollment (Fall 2021)	Public Grades 9-12 Enrollment (Fall 2021)	Enrollment in Private Schools
Colorado	880,597	600,760	279,837	59,320
Kansas	485,424	339,715	145,709	46,380
Missouri	888,823	618,139	270,684	109,040
Nebraska	327,564	229,944	97,620	40,270
North Dakota	116,864	83,417	33,447	11,520
South Dakota	141,307	99,607	41,700	119,880
Wyoming	93,093	64,169	28,924	2,940

Note: Public schools include traditional public and charter schools.

3–5-year-old Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (% distribution by race/ethnicity) (2021)

Jurisdiction	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native	Two or More Races
Colorado	58.2%	62.5%	56.4%	52.0%	50.4%	++	++	59.7%
Kansas	61.5%	62.9%	69.8%	52.4%	51.3%	++	++	69.2%
Missouri	53.2%	54.4%	40.3%	58.4%	++	++	++	54.9%
Nebraska	59.4%	60.2%	++	54.6%	++	++	++	61.0%
North Dakota	40.1%	41.7%	++	++	++	++	++	++
South Dakota	56.4%	57.7%	++	++	++	++	44.9%	++
Wyoming	55.8%	56.9%	++	++	++	++	++	++

++ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate, or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

Public Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (% distribution by total) (Fall 2021)

Jurisdiction	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Two or More Races
Colorado	56.8%	4.8%	31.6%	2.9%	0.2%	0.9%	2.8%
Kansas	68.0%	7.4%	16.4%	2.5%	0.2%	1.3%	4.3%
Missouri	74.7%	17.1%	4.5%	1.8%	0.1%	0.5%	1.3%
Nebraska	70.8%	6.7%	16.0%	2.0%	0.1%	1.5%	2.9%
North Dakota	83.7%	2.4%	0.1%	1.1%	0.2%	9.1%	3.3%
South Dakota	79.8%	2.5%	3.5%	1.4%	0.1%	11.6%	1.1%
Wyoming	81.0%	1.1%	12.3%	0.8%	0.1%	3.3%	1.4%

Number of Students by School Locale (Fall 2019)

Jurisdiction	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
Colorado	368,483	326,360	81,039	137,077
Kansas	138,853	84,075	122,680	145,695
Missouri	164,709	313,294	179,033	247,890
Nebraska	135,167	38,056	63,881	37,202
North Dakota	30,910	13,306	21,628	48,195
South Dakota	36,733	2,322	40,679	59,749
Wyoming	24,111	1,485	39,457	29,563

English Language Learners (Fall 2020)

Jurisdiction	Total	Percentage of Total Enrollment
United States	4,963,388	10.3%
Colorado	96,490	10.5%
Kansas	42,833	9.2%
Missouri	34,219	3.8%
Nebraska	23,035	7.2%
North Dakota	4,018	3.6%
South Dakota	6,529	4.8%
Wyoming	2,531	2.7%

Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (2019–2020)^a

Jurisdiction	Total	Percentage of Total Enrollment
United States	26,000,645 ^a	52.1% ^a
Colorado	371,748	40.7%
Kansas	228,893	46.6%
Missouri	452,727	50.0%
Nebraska	150,419	45.6%
North Dakota	34,486	30.2%
South Dakota	50,582	36.3%
Wyoming	32,731	34.6%

^a For the United States data, total includes imputation for nonreporting states.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Colorado

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	25	205	250	2,040	13	4,476	256
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	305	209	322	3,464	21	3,801	415
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	958	1,704	5,559	38,572	204	47,294	4,414

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Kansas

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	19	104	284	870	5	3,134	250
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	62	167	391	1,398	7	5,395	375
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	671	952	5,844	13,097	119	43,481	4,324

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Missouri

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	8	107	1,134	512	16	4,681	334
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	40	182	1,091	717	19	7,567	539
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	511	1,286	20,559	7,283	221	80,293	5,756

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Nebraska

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	X	52	99	297	X	1,383	36
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	68	117	228	758	7	2,842	169
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	900	826	4,057	9,440	50	30,050	2,538

X: Data suppressed due to small size.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – North Dakota

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	130	10	58	70	3	1,046	170
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	209	17	102	125	3	1,186	73
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	1,508	118	858	1,127	28	10,332	797

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – South Dakota

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	94	X	20	62	X	666	59
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	317	30	64	121	3	1,237	112
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	2,944	228	689	1,511	22	13,311	1,174

X: Data suppressed due to small size.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Wyoming

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	37	X	9	190	X	858	40
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	82	10	14	309	4	1,662	65
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	635	73	132	2,051	27	9,790	487

X: Data suppressed due to small size.

Student Enrollment Reflection Questions

- Based on the number of students by school locale, where are the majority of your students located?
- Looking at the enrollment distribution by race percentages, how diverse is your student population?
- How does the percentage of students qualifying as ELLs in your jurisdiction compare to the overall percentage of ELLs throughout the United States?
- How does the percentage of students qualifying for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) in your jurisdiction compare to the overall percentage of students qualifying for FRPL throughout the United States?

Graduation Information^{b, c}

Demographic	United States	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Total ACGR for all Students	87%	82%	88%	90%	88%	89%	84%	82%
Percent Economically Disadvantaged (2019-2020) ^d	71%	62%	81%	77%	65%	72%	69%	63%
Percent English Learners (2019-2020) ^e	71%	70%	84%	73%	52%	83%	65%	60%
Percent Students with Disabilities (2019-2020) ^f	81%	72%	81%	83%	80%	77%	69%	72%
Homeless Enrolled (2019-2020)	–	57%	68%	78%	63%	65%	53%	64%
Foster Care (2019-2020)	–	31%	62%	69%	55%	73%	43%	–
Private High School Graduates (2018-2019)	340,610	3,210	2,570	6,680	2,470	8,250	760	++

– Not available.

++Reporting standards are not met.

ACGR by Race/Ethnicity % (2019-2020)^g

Jurisdiction	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander ^h	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or More Races
Colorado	86%	77%	75%	90%	67%	82%
Kansas	90%	80%	84%	94%	82%	87%
Missouri	92%	79%	87%	93%	88%	87%
Nebraska	92%	75%	78%	86%	72%	83%
North Dakota	92%	82%	78%	88%	73%	–
South Dakota	90%	80%	72%	83%	53%	78%
Wyoming	84%	66%	78%	86%	62%	80%

++Reporting standards not met.

– Not available.

^b Numbers are the public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by selected student characteristics for 2019-2020.

^c The time when students are identified as having certain characteristics varies by state. Depending on the state, a student may be included in a category if the relevant characteristic is reported in 9th grade data, if the characteristic is reported in 12-grade data, or if it is reported at any point during the student’s high school years.

^d Students who met the state criteria for classification as economically disadvantaged.

^e Students who meet the definition of English Learners as outlined in the Department of Education *EDFacts* workbook. For more information, see [EDFacts Workbook](#).

^f Students identified as children with disabilities under the IDEA.

^g States either report data for a combined “Asian/Pacific Islander” group or report the “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” groups separately. Total represents either a single value reported by the state for “Asian/Pacific Islander” or an aggregation of separate values reported for “Asian” and “Pacific Islander.” “Asian/Pacific Islander” includes the “Filipino” group. Number represent the Total reported Asian/Pacific Islander.

Graduation Rates Reflection Questions

- Do you collect data on 5-year graduation cohorts? If so, how does it compare to the 4-year cohort ACGR?
- Which, if any, graduation rate would you prioritize to increase over the next 5 years?

Student Academic Information

To compare students nationally, we have provided results from the fourth and eighth grade math and reading National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results. NAEP—a congressionally mandated large-scale assessment administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—consists of print and digital assessments in various subject areas. Three of these subjects—mathematics, reading, and science—are assessed most frequently and reported at the state and select district level, usually for grades 4 and 8. The Nation’s Report Card provides results on student performance based on gender, race/ethnicity, public or nonpublic school, teacher experience, and hundreds of other factors.

NAEP assessment results are reported as average scores on a 0-500 scale (reading, mathematics at grades 4 and 8, U.S. history, and geography) or on a 0-300 scale (mathematics at grade 12, science, writing, technology and engineering literacy, and civics). These scale scores, derived from student responses to assessment questions, summarize the overall level of performance attained by that student. Scale scores for individual students are not reported, but summary statistics describing scale scores for groups of students (demographic, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.) are reported. More information about NAEP can be found at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

Academic Achievement: NAEP (2022) National and State Averages

Jurisdiction	4th Grade Math	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Math	8th Grade Reading
United States	235	216	273	259
Colorado	236	223	275	263
Kansas	235	215	272	256
Missouri	232	213	272	258
Nebraska	242	219	279	259
North Dakota	240	218	278	258
South Dakota	239	218	281	262
Wyoming	243	225	281	261

Student Academic Factors Reflection Questions

- How did students in your jurisdiction compare to the national average of students on the NAEP results?
- Given the national average NAEP score, what goal(s) would you set for your students to achieve on the next NAEP administration? For example, would you like the results to stay stable or would you want to see a 3-point increase on 4th grade math? What do you need to achieve this goal?

Non-Academic Information

Non-academic factors for students include suspension and expulsion rates. Additionally, the most recently reported data regarding students who have carried firearms to schools and have experienced bullying (both on school property and electronically) have been included.

Percentage of Students Suspended or Expelled from Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Gender and Ethnicity (2017–2018)^j

Percent who Received Out-of-School Suspensions^j

Demographic	United States	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Total	5.0%	4.8%	4.5%	5.6%	4.7%	2.3%	3.1%	3.7%
Male	6.8%	6.7%	6.4%	7.8%	6.3%	3.3%	4.3%	5.4%
Female	3.0%	2.7%	2.5%	3.3%	2.8%	1.3%	1.7%	1.9%
White	3.4%	3.7%	3.2%	3.7%	3.1%	1.7%	1.9%	3.2%
Black	12.3%	9.7%	14.0%	15.1%	17.6%	4.4%	7.5%	7.8%
Hispanic	4.0%	5.8%	5.0%	4.1%	4.9%	3.0%	3.9%	4.9%
Asian	1.0%	1.7%	1.5%	1.5%	2.1%	1.2%	1.7%	1.7%
Pacific Islander	4.9%	5.5%	4.5%	4.4%	3.9%	1.2%	2.6%	1.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	6.9%	6.9%	6.0%	4.9%	9.3%	6.8%	8.0%	7.7%
Two or More Races	5.5%	5.6%	6.8%	6.1%	8.0%	0.8%	4.9%	3.8%

Percent Expelled^k

Demographic	United States	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Total	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Male	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
Female	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
White	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Black	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	1.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.6%
Hispanic	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Asian	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
Two or More Races	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%

^j Data by race/ethnicity excludes students with disabilities served only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (i.e., those not receiving services under IDEA).

^j An out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a student is temporarily removed from his or her regular school (either in person or virtual) for disciplinary purposes for at least half a day (but less than the remainder of the school year) to another setting (e.g., home or behavior center). Out-of-school suspensions include removals with or without the continuation of educational services.

^k Expulsions are actions taken by a local education agency to remove a student from his or her regular school (either in person or virtual) for disciplinary purposes, with or without the continuation of education services, for

the remainder of the school year or longer, in accordance with local education agency policy. Expulsions also include removals resulting from violations of the Gun Free Schools Act that are modified to less than 365 days.

Firearms (2019-2020)

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Students Who Brought Firearms to or Possessed Firearms at School	Number of Students Who did this per 100,000 Students, Enrolled
United States	2,431	4.8
Colorado	46	5.0
Kansas	27	5.4
Missouri	3	0.3
Nebraska	12	3.6
North Dakota	4	3.4
South Dakota	4	2.9
Wyoming	9	9.5

Bullying (2017)

Jurisdiction	Percentage of Public School Students Bullied on School Property ^l	Percentage of Public School Students Electronically Bullied ^m
United States	19.0%	14.9%
Colorado	18.0%	14.5%
Kansas	19.8%	15.8%
Missouri	23.3%	19.4%
Nebraska	22.4%	17.5%
North Dakota	24.3%	18.8%
South Dakota	–	–
Wyoming	–	–

– Not available.

^l Bullying was defined for respondents as “when one or more students tease, threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again.” “On school property” was not defined for survey respondents.

^m Includes “being bullied through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting” for 2011 through 2015, and “being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media” for 2017.

Student Non-Academic Factors Reflection Questions

- What policies are in place to address recent issues of school violence?
- How does your state compare to the national average? Is this a number you would like to change? What other information do you need to make an informed decision about this issue?

Teacher Information

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Public School Teachers (Fall 2019)	Pupil/Teacher Ratio (Fall 2020)	Teachers in Private Schools
Colorado	53,901	16.9	5,100
Kansas	36,603	13.6	3,670
Missouri	69,145	13.2	9,500
Nebraska	24,028	13.7	2,800
North Dakota	9,284	12.5	900
South Dakota	9,930	14.1	1,010
Wyoming	7,391	12.8	300

Teacher Qualifications

The following table includes the highest degree earned and years of full-time teaching experience by state and United States. Data from 2011-2012 was the latest data reported at the national level.

Jurisdiction	Degree Levels, Percentage – Less than Bachelor's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Bachelor's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Master's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Education Specialist or Doctor's (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – Less than 3 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – 3 to 9 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – 10 to 20 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – Over 20 (2011-2012)
United States	3.8%	39.9%	47.7%	8.7%	9.0%	33.3%	36.4%	21.3%
Colorado	2.8%!	36.1%	49.9%	11.2%	10.8%	33.4%	42.9%	12.9%
Kansas	3.8%	43.8%	47.0%	5.4%	12.5%	27.4%	32.7%	27.4%
Missouri	4.4%	33.3%	57.5%	4.8%	10.4%	35.3%	35.2%	19.2%
Nebraska	5.5%	44.9%	45.9%	3.7%	10.6%	27.2%	34.6%	27.6%
North Dakota	6.9%	59.1%	30.1%	3.9%	12.2%	24.6%	30.6%	32.6%
South Dakota	2.3%!	68.8%	26.6%	2.3%!	8.8%	24.6%	32.9%	33.7%
Wyoming	7.0%!	44.3%	41.2%	7.5%!	7.6%!	25.2%	35.1%	32.1%

++Reporting standards not met. Data may be suppressed because the response rate is under 50 percent, there are too few cases for a reliable estimate, or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers Enrolled in Traditional and Alternative Programs

Jurisdiction	Number Enrolled in a Teacher Preparation Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Traditional Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Alternative Program- (Institute of Higher Education [IHE]) (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Enrolled in an Alternative Program- (Not IHE based) (2019-2020)
United States	590,046	69.9%	8.3%	21.9%
Colorado	7,686	83.7%	9.4%	6.9%
Kansas	7,111	78.7%	21.3%	0.0%
Missouri	10,034	82.3%	8.7%	9.0%
Nebraska	4,000	97.1%	2.9%	0.0%
North Dakota	1,992	99.8%	0.0%	0.2%
South Dakota	2,530	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Wyoming	791	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers Who Completed Traditional and Alternative Programs

Jurisdiction	Number Completed a Teacher Preparation Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in Traditional Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in an Alternative Program- (IHE based) (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in an Alternative Program- (Not IHE based) (2019-2020)
United States	151,138	76.8%	11.4%	11.8%
Colorado	2,583	64.2%	19.2%	16.7%
Kansas	2,134	79.8%	20.2%	0.0%
Missouri	3,520	81.3%	8.4%	10.3%
Nebraska	1,310	96.3%	3.7%	0.0%
North Dakota	715	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
South Dakota	652	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Wyoming	247	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Teacher Information Reflection Questions

- Given national issues of teacher shortages, where are the priority areas in your state?
- What teacher preparation institutions or alternative programs does your state offer? Are these programs going to fulfill your educator needs in the next 5 years?

Financial Resources by State

Description	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – Federal (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$1,599,927	\$683,749	\$1,645,054	\$497,506	\$349,167	\$378,303	\$234,448
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – State (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$5,013,783	\$4,920,069	\$3,911,448	\$1,596,679	\$1,078,820	\$614,051	\$976,133
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – Local (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$6,776,712	\$1,844,466	\$7,565,485	\$3,051,342	\$681,319	4932,613	\$721,327
Amounts and percentage changes of inflation-adjusted state, local, and federal revenues per pupil (FY2021)	\$15,161	\$15,461	\$14,869	\$15,847	\$18,349	\$13,793	\$20,824
Percentage change from FY20-21	2.6%	2.3%	7.2%	5.4%	7.7%	8.0%	5.2%
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction – Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$10,803,824	\$6,160,469	\$10,588,953	\$4,455,663	\$1,740,353	\$1,548,522	\$1,682,896

Description	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction – Instruction (In thousands) (FY2021)	\$5,840,131	\$3,674,432	\$6,022,426	\$2,764,720	\$1,067,274	\$915,981	\$991,387
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction - Support Services (In thousands) (FY2021)	\$4,639,011	\$2,240,782	\$4,226,715	\$1,514,261	\$561,756	\$547,421	\$636,255
Current expenditures per pupil – Total (In thousands) (FY2021)	\$12,233	\$12,788	\$11,999	\$13,723	\$15,139	\$11,095	\$18,140
Title I expenditures per pupil – (In thousands) (FY2021)	\$181	\$202	\$339	\$253	\$387	\$391	\$423
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$10,803,824	\$6,160,469	\$10,588,953	\$4,455,663	\$1,740,353	\$1,548,522	\$1,682,896

Description	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Instruction and Instruction-related total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$6,467,144	\$3,926,331	\$6,434,079	\$2,904,368	\$1,129,225	\$975,342	\$1,067,681
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Support Services Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	\$4,011,998	\$1,988,883	\$3,815,062	\$1,374,614	\$499,805	\$488,059	\$559,961

Financial Resources Reflection Questions

- Looking at the subfunction allocations, are expenditures allocated proportionately in the correct places?
- How do educator salaries in your state compare to other professional careers?

Appendix D. Summary of Stakeholder Input

Data Source	# of Responses	Time Period	Topics by Category
Public comments	164	August 18 to October 15, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting strong instruction and academic achievements • Supporting specific student populations • Supporting teachers, leaders, and school personnel • Supporting student and educator wellbeing • Developing an effective technical assistance response
Governor/ CSSO / REL Governing Board input	5	September 15 to October 15, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting students mental and behavioral health • Improving student absenteeism • Increasing opportunities for career readiness, CTE preparedness • Addressing educator shortages • Supporting strategies for recovery learning (post pandemic) • Supports for key student populations (student with disabilities, English learners, Native American students) • Implementation of culturally responsive strategies/instruction • Support with curriculum (science of reading) • Building family connections; parental empowerment