

**RAC – Midwest Region**  
**Meeting #3**  
**November 16, 2023**

- [Bryan] Good afternoon, and welcome. Today is Thursday, November 16, 2023, and the time is 4 p.m. Eastern. The meeting will come to order for the Regional Advisory Committee for the Midwest Region. As a reminder, this meeting is open to members of the public, and will be recorded as a matter of the public record.

At this time, I will now conduct a roll call. When I say your name, please unmute yourself, say, "Present," or obviously not present, and then re-mute yourself, and I'll acknowledge it for the record. As a note too, the roll call will be in alphabetical order, if that is helpful, if you're keeping track. Bobbie Burnham?

- [Bobbie] Here.

- Thank you. Constance Beecher?

- [Constance] Present.

- Thank you. Matthew Bowen?

- [Matthew] Present.

- Thank you. Kim Biryanic?

- [Kim] Present.

- Thank you. Stacey Gray Akyea? Not present. Jessica Horowitz-Moore? Not present. Mark Klaisner?

- [Mark] Present.

- Thank you. Joseph Murphy?

- [Joe] Present.

- Thank you. Welcome. Erick Pruitt?

- [Erick] Present.
  - Thank you. Chris Ruddy? Not present. Tammy Sebastian? Not present.
- Shawn Smith?
- [Shawn] Present.
  - Thank you. And LaTonya Turner?
  - [Dr. Turner] Present.
  - Great. At this time, we have met quorum, and the meeting may proceed with all privileges therein, including voting privileges.
  - [Tammy] Bryan, I'm not sure if you called my name. I had trouble logging on.
  - Oh, thank you.
  - I'm here. I'm present.
  - Who was that? I'm sorry.
  - Tammy Sebastian.
  - Thank you, Tammy. I'm sorry.
  - No problem.
  - All right, acknowledging it. Got you. All right, and again, we have met quorum, so the meeting may proceed with all voting privileges. Thank you. All right, at this time, much like previous meetings, the rules of engagement are the same. If you'd like to make a comment or state anything, please just simply use the Raise Hand function, and the chair or myself will call on you at that time.
- Our agenda is obviously call to order and roll call, which you just successfully completed. We'll review today's agenda, and the objectives, review the recommended priorities for the Midwest Region, review the draft report that's been produced by section, deliberate over that report draft, vote to approve the report and the recommendations, or not, and then adjourn.
- Next slide. Today's meeting objectives, we'll review the report draft and recommended priorities, deliberate the full committee to...well, excuse me, the

full committee will deliberate and comment on that draft. And then lastly, we'll vote on approval of the report to be submitted to the Secretary of Education.

- Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for being with us. Next, we will summarize the RAC needs-sensing activities. Data collection methods and options included disseminating an online survey link via email, and posting on social media and public websites, interviews, and focus groups.

The online survey asked respondents to identify their state and affiliation, and allowed them to identify needs, and make recommendations through an open-ended question. The Midwest RAC members contributed to a stakeholder tracking table, which included the stakeholder groups, the contact name, the communication date, communication mode, whether it was a survey, focus group, or etc., interview, what the request was, and listed the results.

Input regarding the priority areas of the focus for the Midwest RAC was drawn from over 150 online public comments, representing a spectrum of stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and parents.

Their participation ensured a well-rounded and inclusive perspective on critical focal points. Administrators provided insight shaped by organizational and systemic considerations, while teachers contributed to on-the-ground experiences and perspective within their educational settings. Parents also offered valuable input reflective of their community needs and aspirations.

Much of our data for the needs-sensing activity was centered on committee discussing the public comments, the feedback from various governor's offices, chief state school officers, and REL governing boards, as well as our state profile data, as well as reports from various research institutions.

Next slide. During Meeting 2, the committee voted to approve the following recommended priorities. Priority one, teacher workforce, including shortages, recruitment, retention, and diversifying.

Priority two, early childhood education, which included access, alignment, program requirements. Priority three focused on student well-being and mental health, including the impact on attendance. Priority four, supporting special populations, including multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.

And priority five, evidence-based literacy instruction, and the science of reading. For each priority, the committee summarized the needs, and generated strategies to meet the needs through technical assistance.

And the committee voted to approve the following... Oh, I already did that. Sorry. The committee voted on... Are we on? I'm sorry, slide nine.

The chairperson and the committee members nominated committee members to serve on the writing subcommittees to draft the report during Meeting 2, and their names and assignments are on slide nine. Next, myself and another subcommittee member, Constance Beecher, will briefly review the data collection activities section, the recommended priorities, including any identified emerging needs.

Slide 10, please. For each of our priorities, we will briefly discuss why the priority was included, what the rationale for including it is, and review one to two key technical assistance activities.

And with that, we will start with priority one, and Constance will give an overview of priority one.

- Okay. Thank you, Bobbie. So, priority one is teacher workforce. This priority was included because the Midwest educational system is facing a critical challenge and a severe shortage of qualified teachers.

The committee found this is primarily due to barriers to entry and retention within the field, leading many educators to leave the profession. The barriers include lack of resources, including compensation, established systems that impact who chooses to stay, systems such as mentoring, lack of access to higher education for underrepresented groups, and a growing negative political discourse on public education.

Along with an impending retirement wave, there's a substantial drop in the number of teachers who complete their educational preparation programs and enter the profession, exacerbating the teacher shortage. Some technical activities that were suggested, suggest strategies to increase the partnership and collaboration between K-12 districts and higher educational institutions, continued federal support and expansion of teacher quality preparation funding, along with expiration of funding for student teachers so that they could receive a paid internship, and remove barriers to completing their education.

The Midwest Region recommends additional support for providing mentorship programs for new teachers, and this is to improve not only skill building, but connection to the school and districts. That's what I have for priority one.

- Thank you, Constance. Priority two, early childhood education, including access, alignment, and program requirements. The Midwest RAC members felt that this should be a priority area because of the economic impact in that early care and education allows adults to enter and remain in the workforce. The strong early childhood education also closes achievement and opportunity gaps prior to children entering kindergarten.

And with the reduction or elimination in these gaps, the need for remediation will also be reduced or eliminated. A high-quality childcare experience can strengthen a child's language acquisition as well, and brain development, which we know reflects on the ability to read proficiently.

Recommendations in this area include also evidence supporting this priority includes state data, established research, low regional rankings and preschool scores, and kindergarten readiness assessments. The Midwest region recommends aligning and ensuring continuity of services. The focus on aligning early childhood education with pre-K through 3rd grade and beyond will ensure that gains made in preschool translate into improved performance in math and literacy achievement scores as commonly measured by the end of 3rd grade.

Another recommendation is to ensure that every child has access to quality early education irrespective of background or economic status. To achieve this, it is recommended to consider current funding structures by evaluating existing K-12 funding models and exploring ways to extend similar funding principles to early childhood education.

Redirecting resources to support and enhance early childhood programs is essential, recognizing the long-term economic and societal benefits. Priority three, student well-being and mental health, including impact on attendance.

Mental health needs of students and teachers surfaced as a high-priority theme in the public comments received from stakeholders in the Midwest region, the majority from school administrators. School safety, chronic absenteeism, and dropout prevention were also identified in the public comments as high-need issues to address.

Post-COVID data reveals that there has been a noticeable decline in student attendance, predominantly attributed to mental health issues. A considerable portion of the students' chronic absenteeism is directly linked to their mental health challenges. Unmet mental and emotional needs hinder students' ability to excel academically.

Recommendations in this area is the critical need to recognize the necessity of collaborating with licensed professionals who specialize in mental health beyond the services which can be provided by the licensed classroom teacher.

The urgency of prioritizing student mental health is evidenced by the Surgeon General's warnings concerning the mental health of youth. Implementation of a community-oriented approach spanning year-round student services that emphasizes partnerships and wraparound services by engaging various stakeholders is a highly effective approach. It becomes imperative to integrate services within the mental health framework.

There is a strong recommendation to broaden the comprehension of trauma and its multifaceted effects, recognizing its profound influence on mental health needs. Elevating our understanding through a collective approach that engages a spectrum of providers capable of identifying and addressing mental health requirements from diverse perspectives is critical.

And priority four, supporting special populations. The committee members unanimously agreed that supporting special populations should be a top priority. They emphasize that these populations are not separate from the general student body but are integral to the overall educational community.

Focusing on the needs of special populations benefits all students. The evidence from achievement gaps, enrollment trends, and challenges faced by students with disabilities, and English learners underscored the need to focus on providing equitable support and resources for these groups.

Additionally, the committee acknowledged that addressing the needs of special populations again ultimately benefits all students, and contributes to a more inclusive and effective educational system in the region. Recommendations in this area include... The Midwest RAC Advisory Committee stressed the importance of recognizing that even students...or that even though we are talking about students from special populations, we are really, truly talking about all students, and the recommendations in this priority mirror that belief.

The recommendations, even though designed to better serve students from special populations, are recommendations that will provide support to any student who may be struggling. The first recommendation is to provide continued support for the implementation of a multi-tiered systems of support framework. We need to ensure that Tier 1 or core instruction is strong, and then build a system that provides support to students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 of the MTSS framework.

The second recommendation is to identify systems or models that have experienced success meeting the needs of all students, including students from special populations. The Midwest would benefit from the identification of the successful models, the explanation of the outcomes, and the identification of evidence-based strategies, practices, and/or interventions, providing support for schools or systems that replicate practices, or developing a playbook that explains the steps to take to build a successful system would be most valuable.

And priority five will be back with Constance.

- Okay, so priority five relates to evidence-based literacy instruction. This priority was included because post-pandemic state and national data has indicated a decline in literacy rates in elementary and middle schools.

The decline is alarming and highlights the urgent need to address literacy issues. In 2022, NAEP scores for age 9 students declined 5 points in reading. This is the largest average score decline in reading since 1990. The committee recognized the importance of preparing students for global competition. Literacy skills in the early grades are essential for students to compete effectively not only nationally, but on a global scale.

The committee also emphasized that investing in high-quality early literacy practices can lead to cost savings in the long run by reducing the need for costly interventions and remediations. Some recommended activities include the state education agencies across the nation need to support a curriculum process that is consistent, and ensures districts are choosing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based instructional materials.

Recommendations include developing a toolkit for states with sample rubrics, standardized pre and post-tests for teachers as they begin their training, communication and information from publishers, sharing common practices that ensure the selection processes are thorough and results in evidence-based

curricula and materials, and share ways that states are evaluating the impact of their investments in comprehensive literacy reform efforts.

Another activity echoes the recommendation of support for teachers in priority one in the form of coaches or mentors. Develop a literacy coaching implementation plan or model, perhaps convene a state-level learning network specific to this topic to share successful strategies. Again, related to priority four, evidence-based strategies to support the science of reading with special populations.

A comprehensive approach to improving literacy outcomes must include strategies for supporting multilingual learners, and students with disabilities, including dyslexia. Technical assistance recommendation includes supports for states to support districts specifically in this area by making a toolkit or repository of best practice and examples.

There also could be a state-level learning network convened specific to that topic so that states could share successful strategies and processes.

- Thank you, Constance. Next slide, please. So now that we have summarized the report, committee members will have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions or propose specific changes to address the accuracy of the committee findings, and recommendations of the draft report.

So as a committee, you're being asked to verify the accuracy of the report, and the recommendations and any proposed revisions. Any proposed revision should address the accuracy of the report. Edits should be limited to, again, the accuracy of the report contents. Edits related to the writing style, grammar, or formatting preferences will not be considered at this time.

Specific changes should be made in writing in the chat, and if there are changes recommended, the committee must first...or the writing in the chat, and a vote must first be taken to approve the edits to that section. Members should propose specific edits, citing the page number and the paragraph, and propose specific alternate language.

You should propose the language orally or in the chat for the full committee's consideration. So at this time, we will open up for discussion from committee members, thinking through does the report accurately represent the RAC's



deliberations and needs-sensing around priorities? And is anything inaccurate or missing regarding the data and needs-sensing activities?

Bryan, you have your hand up.

- Thanks, Bobbie. I just want to acknowledge two things. First, from the previous slide, you probably noticed some real-time edits. Kim Biryanic also contributed to priorities two and four, so her name is added to those contributions. And I want to also acknowledge that Stacey Gray Akyea has joined us as well. Thank you, and welcome.

- Do committee members have any suggested revisions at this time? I'm not seeing...

Well, I only have a few faces up, so if I'm missing any hands, could someone let me know?

- Bobbie, I'm also checking, and I do not see any hands raised.

- Thank you, Bryan. So at this point in the meeting, I will call for a vote for the RAC members to approve the final report. Members, as I call the vote, please use the Raise Hand function so we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record.

I call for a vote for the Midwest RAC to approve the report to be submitted to the Secretary of Education. Again, I'm supposed to count the votes, but I only have four faces up, so...

- [Tech] The screenshot has been taken.

- Thank you. The report has been accepted by the Regional Advisory Council. And I believe the committee will...as a note, the committee will be terminated by the Secretary after submission of its report to the Secretary.

The committee may be reconvened at the discretion of the Secretary. The duration of the committee is from the date established until the committee report is submitted. Therefore, the committee...well, the committee will be required to meet again at a date to be announced to conclude its work, which we have done today.

So I believe we are good to go. And if we don't have any other questions or comments... Shawn, I see your hand up.

Transcription by [www.speechpad.com](http://www.speechpad.com)

Page 9 of 10

- I'm sorry.

- Okay. My hand's up, too. I've got to take it down. Sorry. Okay. I believe that concludes Meeting 3 of the Midwest Regional Advisory Council?

- Yeah. Thanks, Bobbie. Any further questions or comments from anybody? Okay. I just want to say thank you for all your time throughout this process, your professionalism with one another, and with us at the department, and our contractors, and most of all, just for your contributions and your expertise.

It is greatly appreciated. At this time, I make a motion to adjourn the meeting for the Regional Advisory Committee for the Midwest Region. Do I have a second?

- Second.

- Thank you. All those in favor, "Aye."

- [Together] Aye.

- Thank you. All right, the meeting is now adjourned on Thursday, 16 November, 2023, at time, 4:27 p.m. Eastern. Meeting adjourned and thank you.