RAC –West Region
Meeting #3
November 14, 2023

- [Muhammad] Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us for the Regional Advisory Committee for the West Region. This meeting is open to the members of the public and will be recorded for public record. This meeting will come to order for the Regional Advisory Committee meeting for the West Region. My name is Muhammad Kara, and I am the Designated Federal Official. I will conduct a roll call, and by doing that, I will read aloud the names of the members of the committee.

If your name is called, please say "present," and I will acknowledge that. First on my list is Dr. Joseph Martin. Okay. Next is Dr. Kelly McQuaid.

- [Dr. McQuaid] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Meg.

- [Meg] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Vanessa.

- [Vanessa] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Michelle.

- [Michelle] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Dr. Tonia.

- [Dr. Tonia] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Brandy.

- Okay. Next is Tiffany. Next is Kathy Prather.

- [Kathy P.] Present.

- Thank you. Next is Alexa Cunningham.

- [Alexa] Present.

- Thank you. And last is Gerry. All right. And now we'll do a quick calculation to make sure we've met quorum...and we have, so we can move on to the next part. So as you all know, Kathy is out for this meeting, so I will act as Chair. So we will outline our meeting agenda and objectives.

So first, we will review the recommended priorities identified in the draft report. We'll review the data collection section of the report, review each identified priority, and any emerging needs. Then we will deliberate on the draft report. And lastly, we'll conduct a final vote to approve the report, and submit it to the Secretary of Education. Next slide.

So our meeting objectives, during this meeting, the subcommittee members will review the report of the assessment of the education needs of the region, and committee regions. Subcommittee members will review the data collection section, and the recommended priority section. After sections are reviewed, the full committee can discuss the report, propose specific changes, or accept the report as written.

If changes are proposed, the committee will vote to accept the section with revisions. Finally, the full committee will conduct a final vote to approve the report, and again, submit it to the Secretary of Education. We can go to the next slide. So in this specific committee for the West Region, we focused our data collection or our needs-sensing focus specifically on publicly available data, which includes the regional and state reports that were provided by MSG, and including we did conduct eight focus groups that were led by one of our committee members.

This is also in addition to the comments that were collected both from the public side, in addition to the chief state school officers, governors, and the REL governing boards for each of the region. Next slide. So at this time, we will review each of the priorities that were accepted in the second meeting. And for this specific committee meeting, we selected four priorities, the first one being chronic absenteeism, opportunity gap, social-emotional learning, and teacher retention and recruitment.

So at this time, I will defer to the subcommittee members to take themselves off of mute and discuss in about two to three minutes their specific subsection. So for the first one, I believe I will pass it on to Dr. Kelly McQuaid.

- Oh, thank you. So in defining chronic absenteeism as missing at least 10% of school, we found that there's evidence that absenteeism levels are higher now than before the COVID-19 pandemic. And this was true looking at 2020-21, the first full year to the following year, in all four West Region states.

This is important to us because poor school attendance has high costs in terms of academic learning, connection to peers, teachers, schools, their health, high school graduation, and their future employment. We found that districts are having some challenges tracking absences. Poverty, we discussed, may influence this absenteeism.

When they have fewer material resources. Students don't want to come to school. We also discussed the fact that absenteeism has, you know, both school and home components. Arizona was cited as having the lowest ratio of school counselors to students, yet in some of our remote districts, school leaders are more interested in hiring social workers who can really assist with issues in the home as well.

California shared with us that chronic absenteeism is an important topic for parents, as well. When you think about the long-term effects of absenteeism, and that it hasn't gotten better yet, we're recommending that we support LEAs in recruiting well-trained teachers for poor students, and in identifying these evidence-based interventions, especially for the student groups who have experienced these steep increases in chronic absenteeism, and that we study which interventions are working well, and for which student groups.

And when you're thinking about supporting specific student populations, we know students can't learn if they're not attending school or attending all their classes, so technical assistance should be provided to encourage schools to create these healthy, safe learning environments so that all of our students feel this sense of belonging and connection, that we help our school staff find and provide relevant, engaging learning experiences so that our students want to come to schools.

We also discussed LEAs might hire attendance and parent specialists to work with students and parents to improve attendance, not in this kind of legal aspect, but really trying to address the causes. And then we also thought that LEAs might develop a multi-tiered system of supports, kind of an influence model to support those school attendance interventions, where Tier 1 might celebrate

attendance, Tier 2 could provide mentorship, Tier 3 could provide other intervention strategies, and kind of improve family involvement.

And I think that kind of gives you at least a capsule there.

- Thank you so much. We will move on to the opportunity gap.

- Yes, thank you so much. My name is Vanessa Marrero, and I wanted to just say good evening, good afternoon. As it relates to the opportunity gaps, there is differential availability to access to experiences with high-quality resources amongst members of groups identified by socially constructed categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

Opportunity gaps differ from achievement gap in that an opportunity gap really refers to the inputs, such as policies and practices, and that policies are driven and influence student relationships with education resources. Deeper exploration and literature have experience opportunity gaps which have negative influences on academic success and general academic experiences.

And these gaps can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including the quality of education provided and available. Our evaluative work with opportunity gaps focuses on the educational resources aimed at supporting students' academic and social-emotional needs, or at engaging family and community members. Stakeholders that we identified included schools, such as also including public schools and charter schools, public charters, businesses, teachers, librarians, administrators, members of the Regional Advisory Laboratory governing boards, local educational agencies, parents, state educational agencies, adult educational programs, and other customers.

In fact, in September and October, seven focus groups were held publicly to include the statewide California Family Engagement Network, Los Angeles Parent Organization Network, San Joaquin Valley, Stockton Unified School District, San Francisco Bay-Berkeley Unified School District, Statewide Parents for Public Schools, and the San Bernardino County Office of Superintendent and Schools, as well as the California Association for Bilingual Education.

In this area of supporting instruction and academic achievement, we found that due to achievement/opportunity gaps, students were not being supported in their

current school systems and have less advantageous outcomes in college and career. I think I want to highlight the recommendations.

The Department of Education should support school sites and specific issues such as chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, school climate, extended year graduation and college and career readiness curriculum, and have a focus also on accountability and improvement, identifying appropriate interventions and supports.

Thank you.

- Thank you so much. I will cover the social-emotional learning, as I received some talking points from Kathy that she wanted me to reiterate. So in regard to social-emotional learning, the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning defines SEL as the fostering of social and emotional competencies through explicit instruction, and through student-centered learning approaches that help students engage in learning processes, and develop analytical, communicative, and collaborative skills.

Here, SEL strategies and education centers on research that is linked to the development development of skills such as building healthy peer relationships, responsible decision-making, self-management, self-awareness, and social awareness. And this relates to student success both inside and outside of the classroom. However, it's important to make the distinction that social-emotional learning does not encompass mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, or bipolar disorder, for example.

Here, the committee recommends clarifying the difference for educators, parents, and students between social-emotional learning and mental health within curricula and internal support, mandating SEL training for teachers who will be implementing the SEL curricula and develop/provide culturally responsive SEL training, which including two districts, must also be highly systematic in collecting SEL and mental health data on students.

Therefore, it is critical that districts have the capabilities to consider the whole child rather than one section. And lastly, I'll just conclude one additional recommendation that says that there should be support for state and district leaders in trying to understand school staffing, such as teacher retention, that may help lead to better professional development.

And lastly, I will turn it back again to Dr. McQuaid for teacher retention.

- All right. Well, we found that the West Region is experiencing a severe shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in urban and rural areas, and this staffing challenge also includes substitute teachers. And that's despite, you know, a seemingly adequate supply of certified teachers, but they've chosen to opt out of the teaching workforce due to low wages, high cost of housing, as well as, you know, even a lack of available housing and access to healthcare in remote areas.

We just found that teachers in this region often face lower salaries, higher living costs, which really leads to a financial strain. And while we've had many alternative pathways into the classroom, we also found that poorly trained teachers require more support from the veteran teachers, which increases the stress they experience.

And this lack of teachers and substitute teachers really leads to other school staff covering the classroom, which further impacts the services for which these staff are typically, you know, responsible. We found a lot of challenging working conditions, including large class size, inadequate teacher preparation, professional learning resources, and often cited low support from school admin.

Many teachers in the West Region leave the profession within the first few years, citing burnout, lack of professional development opportunities, and insufficient support. And some even want further growth opportunities beyond what they can see the 30-year career in the classroom would offer.

We also discussed ensuring that diversity in the teaching workforce is a real challenge, and we need to recruit and retain teachers who reflect that region's diverse student population, which really leads me into the technical assistance recommendations, that we need to develop trainings to reduce bias, and improve teaching because we know that our Black and Hispanic students often have a significantly higher share of their classes who are taught by alternatively certified or underqualified teachers.

To highlight another recommendation, we suggest that you provide mentorship for early career teachers. This would give opportunities and training for teacher leaders to work with these teachers as well so that new teachers have support, and veteran teachers have leadership opportunities. They may desire to remain in the classroom rather than be promoted into admin. And then, finally, the

Regional Assistance Centers could do research to provide the support needed to get policy and legislation passed.

And centers could also bring programs and practices that demonstrate results really to the forefront so that more schools and districts can adopt these to really make a notable difference. Thanks.

- Thank you all so much. At this time, that concludes our summary of our report. At this time, we will start the deliberation process. So now that our report has been summarized, I ask committee members to have the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions or propose specific changes to address the accuracy of the committee findings and recommendations of the report.

So I will leave it up to you all to discuss if there's anything that you all would like to change. There doesn't have to be anything to change, but if you all would like to discuss or bring any topics up to the forefront, please use the Raise Hand function, and I will call on you. Yes, Dr. Martin? If you are speaking, you are on mute.

- Can you hear me now?

- Yes.

- Okay. I appreciate all of these recommendations. And the concern that I have is I think it's one thing to respond to the kinds of issues that come up at the school level after the fact.

What I mean after the fact is that I'd like to see us be more proactive. In other words, before teachers, and before the administrators, before the counselors end up going to the school, to the field, like, we've got to be much more deliberate to make sure that they're well prepared, to make sure that they have...that every consideration is is afforded the candidates to truly understand what the needs are.

As it is, I think that when I look across the continent, and look at the programs of studies for teachers, administrators, most of them are typical mainstream curriculum. There isn't any real special consideration to be able to say that this program here is intended, it's designed to address some of the specific needs that we see in our minority communities, rural schools, Reservation schools, in urban communities where some of these greatest needs are at.

So my recommendation is that in the sets of recommendation, that somehow, we provide some guidelines to make sure that the teacher training institutions, and the institutions for preparing administrators are properly organized and prepared so that we're not addressing these things after the fact or trying to respond to some of the symptoms issues.

I think that if we can be more proactive about it, we might do, I would say, a much better job in being more effective with these things. Because I can see some of these things, some of these recommendations that come out, they can end up becoming band-aids rather than really addressing the root of the issues.

- Thank you for that. Do you...knowing that if we add any more recommendations, the committee will have to take a vote on that as well, are you specifically wanting to add that recommendation that you stated into a specific priority?

And if so, can you tell me which priority it is so we can bring up the document to make that edit?

- It would be if wherever there's a teacher training or training for administrators, that section.

- Robert, can you pull up the report, just so we, everybody in the committee knows where this proposed alternative will...or not alternative, excuse me, proposed recommendation will be?

And I'm assuming, and I don't want to speak for you, Dr. Martin, so I'm assuming we would add that section into teacher recruitment and retention, since it's more training-based? That's if I'm hearing you correctly?

- Well, I think if there's something more specific to preparation and training, as opposed to retention [inaudible]

- If other folks have input on the recommendation Dr. Martin just stated, on where the placement should be if the recommendation...where it could be added, please let me know. I know, Vanessa, I know you have your hand up, so I'll let you go.

I'll let you speak.

- Okay. Thank you very much. I just wanted to... This is more underscoring. It was lightly mentioned in the final report, but I just wanted to make sure that

there are certain pieces that are underscored, and I have three specific ones to mention. One is the thematic focus of the regional educational leadership feedback, right?

So we met with...we had focus groups with a number of regional leaders, as well as other types of data, and wanting to make sure that those themes are really brought to the surface. These are student engagement, equity, and educational access, integrating mental health support, that those are distinctly mentioned, and perhaps the technical assistance that is recommended is streamlined to be able to support that.

The second is detailed analysis related to public comments. While the public comments were mentioned, there are some key things that I want to bring up that came out. One is the need for personalized learning of every single student, support for students with disabilities, and students who are English language learners, and the socioeconomic impact, as well as an emphasis for cohesiveness and partnership with family and community engagement.

So that's another area that I think is important. And the last is to really emphasize that addressing the opportunity gap will address academic achievement, but it will also address other systemic issues that sometimes a district cannot prevent.

However, if we streamline resources, we can influence the system enough to be able to support our learners. Thank you.

- Thank you for that. And one thing that I will add, and thank you, Danielle, for the comment, is that for these recommendations that both Dr. Martin and Vanessa are both proposing, could you all please provide, you know, the page number, or the specific text that you would like the recommendation to be? Since the committee needs to vote on it, we all need to see what the actual text will be.

So if you all can look within the report and provide a page number to where we would add this, and then the additional to the text. I know Robert is taking some notes, but there was a lot said in the last two minutes, so I want to make sure that it was all captured. Kathy...

- Thank you. I wanted to just point out, and this could be because the report that we saw is...or have seen so far is draft form, but in Appendix C, the totals by

jurisdiction for the West District in schools where it lists "total number of operating districts, etc.," that information is duplicated for student enrollment.

So I'm guessing maybe that was just a placeholder, and that you would be putting in the student enrollment data, but the chart was incorrect. It looks like the student enrollment data was just duplicated from the school district info, as opposed to student info.

I just wanted to point that out. Thank you.

- Thank you for that. I will make sure we correct those as well before we send it off. Since we're... Yeah, and I think we can still continue to vote after this, we can still continue to vote on it. We'll vote on the language itself, everything else, like the tables, if they need to be corrected, we can fix those even after we vote.

So thank you for bringing that up, Kathy. I want to go back to both... I know Vanessa is typing, I believe she's typing into the chat, but I want to bring back Dr. Martin's comment, and also Vanessa's comment, to make sure that we, as a committee, have understood the recommendation, and want to kind of generate some recommendation that came off from that.

So Dr. Martin, I'm going to ask again if you can come off of mute so that we, as a committee, can know the specific...you know, and maybe Robert can help out, and specific text that you want to add into the report so that we can have a better understanding.

- I think making sure that teachers and administrators are well prepared and appropriately trained before they take their places in schools.

- And I'm going to ask, would you feel comfortable that being added into priority number four, for teacher recruitment and retention?

Or do you have any other place within the report that you believe would be better suited?

- I would have to look at the report. I'm getting a lot of background noise on my end. There are some things I can't understand what you're saying, Muhammad.

- I was saying would you prefer, within your recommendation, would you want it to be in priority number four? And you can take some time to look at the report, to see where specifically you would want it. I can't make that

determination for you all, I'm going to need to know exactly where to insert this recommendation.

So if you want to take a couple minutes to... And we have about a 10-minute max here, but if you want to take a minute just to see where.

- Okay.

- And then I will go to Dr. McQuaid to get her input, and then I will come back, and then we will readdress Vanessa's comment. So Dr. McQuaid?

- Well, I was just thinking that on page 11, it's 11 in the document, but really in the Word doc it's page 15, where it says, "technical assistance recommendations," I'm wondering if this would be a spot to put Dr. Martin's? And I know you're still getting there. Oh, mine looks different.

Oh, no, that's right. Sorry. So you see where it says, under technical assistance recommendations, "schools in rural areas, on Reservations, or in impoverished inner city areas, often experience great difficulty in attracting well-trained teachers who may share the cultures of the students they teach, or who at least have experience working with those students, instructional programs should meet the needs of students," I'm wondering if that wouldn't be a place where we could emphasize or break out Dr.

Martin's point about, you know, the importance of proactively having people trained to meet the needs of their community. I'm just wondering.

- I think that's an ideal place to put it.

- Perfect. And before we vote on it, Dr. Martin, I'm going to need in the chat if you can write out specifically what you stated so that, again, we have it in written record, and that the entire committee can read it, and know that this is what's going to be added. Once that's in there, I will go ahead and call the vote. I'm going to go to Meg real quick, and then I'm going to address...we're going to address Vanessa's comment.

So, Meg? All right, Meg...okay. I'm going to move on. I believe you put your hand down.

- Sorry.

- Oh, okay, sorry. Go ahead.

- Yeah, mine is more of a little bit of a technical thing. I had contributed the conclusion to our subcommittee opportunity gap, but how it reads in the report is it's the conclusion for all of the report. Which I have no problem with, but it reads a little bit funny because it's just focusing on the opportunity. So I don't know if that needs wordsmithing, or right now is the time to introduce that?

Same thing with the introduction part. There's an executive summary that included part of my introduction, and then I saw an introduction heading with nothing on it. So again, it's more like, you know, just the kind of proofreading and editing. The conclusion is on page 21, and then the introduction I'm referring to is on page 3.

- [Alison] This is Alison from Manhattan Strategy. I can say the introduction is not written yet, so that is going to be put in kind of standard language across all ten reports. I can look at the original data. We just kind of took what was given to us as a draft and formatted it into the template that you all received.

So if there are areas that need to be moved, we can do that.

- It just read a little bit like...you know, because it was summarizing all of the priorities.

- Thank you for that, Meg. So at this time, I want to just open up a quick deliberation because we have about three minutes left, so a quick deliberation about Vanessa's comments, and knowing that those are...that we're going to have to vote on this additional priority or putting it into a specific recommendation.

We're going to have to vote on that as a committee, and then once it's adopted, we'll add it into the actual report itself. So I want to give folks, like, 20, 30 seconds at most to read that comment, provide any comments or feedback on that comment, and then we will vote on that as well, while Dr.

Martin includes his comment...or his recommendation in the chat.

- It's in the chat now.

- Dr. Martin, I'm not seeing the comment. Is anyone else seeing the comment? Allison or Robert?

- Oh...

- No, I don't see it.

- I'm going to send it. He sent it to me, I think accidentally, directly.

- Perfect.

- I see it now. Thanks, Vanessa.

- Thank you.

- Yeah, of course.

- So at this time, does anyone have any comments and/or questions about Vanessa's three additional...I want to make sure it's three, yes, three additional recommendations, that they want to add into page 13? Okay.

With that, then, since we're going to have to vote, I'm going to...I would say, members, as I call the vote, please use the Raise Hand function so that we can accurately call the vote and take a screenshot for the record.

And to reiterate, this is to add Vanessa's comments into the report itself. So if you agree, please raise your hand, and keep the hand raised so that we can take a vote. And then, please let me know when the screenshot has been taken.

- The screenshot has been taken.

- Thank you, all. And then, if you all can just please put your hands back down as we move on to the next vote. And now we will move forward to the second vote, which is Dr. Martin's comment. And at this time, I ask 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.

Again, this is for Dr. Martin's comment, which is in the chat. If you agree to add it into the report, please raise your hand. If you do not, please keep your hand down.

- The screenshot has been taken.

- Thank you all.

And I ask, again, if you can all please lower your hands so that we can move on to our last vote, which will be to vote on the entire document, and everything that's included, including these recommendations, as a whole. So before I do

that, I just want to ensure there were no other comments or questions before we move on to the additional...into the final vote.

Okay. So 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 West Region, for the West RAC to approve the report to be submitted to the Secretary of Education.

If you all agree, please use the Raise Hand function. Counting the votes.

- The screenshot has been taken.

- Thank you, all. You all can lower your hands. The report, based off the votes, the report has been accepted by the West Regional Advisory Committee meeting...or committee.

So at this time, this is the end of our meeting. I wanted to provide space just in case there were any pending questions or comments before I adjourn the meeting. Vanessa, I'm not sure if that hand is raised for... Do you have a question?

- I just have a comment.

- Great.

- Okay. I just wanted to thank everybody for their contribution, especially all of the regional leaders who supported, and parents who supported in the focus groups and the public comments. I know it's a hard time, but getting very specific information is, I think, really helpful to designing technical assistance. So thank you, all.

- Thank you for that. And, again, yes, I would love to share my appreciation for the entire committee. I appreciate all the time and effort and... time and effort that you all have spent working on this committee, and to be able to share space with you all. So if there are no other questions, I move to adjourn the meeting for the Regional Advisory Committee meeting for the West Region. I ask committee members to concur by stating "Aye."

- Aye.

- Thank you, all. The meeting is adjourned at 5:38 p.m. Eastern time on November 14, 2023, for the West Regional Advisory Committee meeting. Thank you all. Have a great night.