



## Message from the engagement lead

Welcome to REL Midwest's summer 2017 update! Each month in our newsletter, we aim to provide you with interesting articles about the exciting work of our partnerships. Communicating with you about our work and what we are learning is key to our success. We want to pique your interest and engagement in our work, but we know everyone is busy with full inboxes and little time to read reports. So, we use various methods to convey the information in a way that works well with your schedule and preferences.

How do we plan on communicating with you during the first year of the REL Midwest contract? We already have created an [introductory video](#) and have more videos planned to introduce our staff, explain our partnerships' research agendas, and explore priority topics driving the work of our partnerships. We will produce in-depth blog series, host events (webinars, in-person, and public television program screenings), and more. Our [website](#) will archive these activities and products, and our [Twitter account](#) (@RELMidwest) will keep you up-to-date on the latest information related to REL Midwest's work.

If you have thoughts or feedback on the best ways to communicate with you, we want to hear them. Please feel free to e-mail me at [lishimmel@air.org](mailto:lishimmel@air.org).—**Lisa Shimmel, engagement team lead**

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## Turning research into action: REL Midwest's training, coaching, and technical support work

From technology use to teacher preparation, REL Midwest studies a variety of education topics through its collaborative research partnerships. However, conducting research is only one piece of the equation. A key component of REL Midwest's mission is connecting research to practice; that is, we help teachers, administrators, and policymakers use research to improve classroom practice and district and statewide policies.

To help educators understand and use research, REL Midwest conducts several activities under the umbrella of **training, coaching, and technical support (TCTS)**. To explain TCTS, Jaime Singer, REL Midwest TCTS task lead, compares it with a more familiar concept for educators: professional development. Said Singer, "Professional development is more like someone presenting information to educators, where TCTS is working with stakeholders to improve whatever they're trying to improve."

As the name suggests, TCTS work falls into three buckets: training, coaching, and technical support. During year 1, REL Midwest is starting with projects in training and coaching. As Singer explained, the difference is in the delivery: "Training is meant for a broader audience; usually the practitioners are coming to us. For coaching, we are going to them. It's a smaller audience and we're diving deeper into a particular topic."

Below are some examples of REL Midwest's year 1 training and coaching projects:

- REL Midwest staff conducted a daylong training session with staff from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's (CMSD's) Office of Multilingual Multicultural Education, Office of Research and Evaluation, and Office of Organizational Accountability on creating a research agenda around the district's English learner population.
- In Illinois, REL Midwest will be delivering trainings across the state to support teachers who are using the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS). KIDS is an observation tool used to assess kindergarten readiness in both academic and social-emotional development. REL Midwest's trainings will help teachers better understand how the data collected from the assessment tool can be helpful for their own practice.
- In Iowa, representatives from Area Education Agency 267 and six school districts are partnering to explore ways to improve technology access and use in rural schools. REL Midwest will help partnership members identify challenges that limit technology use, informing the partnership's development and testing of potential solutions in future years.
- In Wisconsin, REL Midwest is supporting the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)'s efforts to close the Black-White achievement gap. REL Midwest and Wisconsin DPI are reviewing existing state- and district-level practices that aim to reduce the achievement gap. To complement current practices, Wisconsin DPI plans to start new cultural competency initiatives for teachers and administrators.

Although our training and coaching projects are new, REL Midwest's success depends on longstanding relationships with our stakeholders. By building strong relationships with state education agencies, districts, and other partners, REL Midwest can discover opportunities to provide meaningful TCTS as stakeholder needs evolve. To drive our upcoming work, "REL Midwest leadership visited stakeholders in our states to find out how we could be responsive to their needs. This informed the focuses of our proposed partnerships," said Singer.

REL Midwest provides TCTS beyond our major partnerships. Although each major partnership is primarily based in one state, REL Midwest has communities of practice around the same topics that bring together multiple states. There will be opportunities for the communities of practice to receive training and coaching as well. Stakeholders can request TCTS support outside of our partnership and community of practice topics.

During the next few years, REL Midwest will provide technical support to partners by creating tools to support the effective use of research. State-, district-, and school-level administrators can use the tools to design studies, collect data, and analyze the results. By providing the tools to apply research in real school, district, and state settings, we hope to help educators improve practice and policy.



## Meet the state liaison: Jackie Burniske

The REL Midwest team includes liaisons who serve each state in our region. These state liaisons are charged with strengthening and expanding REL Midwest's ties across the region so we can better monitor education needs, support key education agencies and organizations, and promote our work, resources, and services.

Jackie Burniske is REL Midwest's state liaison for Michigan and Ohio. A senior technical assistance consultant at American Institutes for Research (AIR), Burniske has more than 30 years of experience in education, including teaching abroad. She also boasts an extensive communications background, and besides serving as a state liaison, she leads communications for REL Southwest.

Although Burniske now lives in Austin, Texas, she grew up in Toledo, Ohio, and has deep ties to the Midwest. "Where you were raised is formative for who you are," Burniske explained, "so I'm a Midwesterner at heart."

As the state liaison for Michigan and Ohio, Burniske is reaching out to key leaders at state education agencies, regional education service centers, professional associations, nonprofits, and the governors' office and state legislature. The focus is on connecting with individuals who are not members of a REL Midwest partnership or community of practice as a way to diversify our support in each state.

"I'm making appointments to learn what the needs of their organizations are and what their priorities are, and then to share with them what REL Midwest does and how we might be able to support them," Burniske explained.

One of her aims is to explore potential partnerships and other short-term solutions for addressing specific education needs. She relays any requests for assistance to REL Midwest's leadership.

This first year, Burniske's goal is to connect with 10 to 15 state leaders. She'll then gradually expand this network over the next five years. To make the best use of her state visits, she's conducting much of her outreach at conferences and other events. For example, she planned her first Ohio trip around Battelle for Kids' Educators Connect for Success Conference in Columbus on June 7–8, 2017.

"The first year is establishing the relationships and then staying in touch regularly," Burniske noted, "making sure that people are aware of all the great work of the Institute of Education Sciences and the RELs, including REL Midwest, so they know what a valuable resource we are."

To provide further needs sensing, Burniske monitors the pulse of education in her two states, tracking news stories and policy reports. "REL Midwest wants to know each state's priorities, their needs, their issues—it's more the global view of the state, whereas our alliance support is more focused."

Burniske is coordinating her efforts with other federally funded research and technical assistance centers that serve her states, such as the [Great Lakes Comprehensive Center](#) (GLCC). For instance, she is participating in the GLCC-led Michigan Strategic Technical Assistance Partnership. This initiative brings together technical assistance providers in Michigan to support the state department of education's plan for transforming Michigan into a top 10 state for education in 10 years.

Enjoying her new role, Burniske noted that she appreciates the chance to reconnect with a region of the country so dear to her heart. "I know the small towns, I know the various places, and I have friends who live and work in both Michigan and Ohio. My best friend from high school lives in Ann Arbor. And," she adds after a beat, "I don't have a preference in the big Ohio State-University of Michigan rival football game that is played after Thanksgiving each year. I'm looking forward to working with all of you!"

Want to learn more? Reach out to your state liaison to learn more about REL Midwest and how we can support and partner with your organization to meet your state's education needs.



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## New webinars and documentaries engage stakeholders in discussions about education research

Each year, REL Midwest hosts a series of events to connect education research to the practical experiences of teachers, school and district leaders, state education agency staff, and other education stakeholders in the region. The first of this year's "Making Connections" events was held May 17, 2017, with the Midwest Early Childhood Education Research Alliance. On the webinar, Equipping Parents to Support Kindergarten Readiness, presenters Spring Dawson-McClure (New York University School of Medicine), Kimberly Mann (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services), and Valerie Young (Parent Ambassador from Illinois Head Start Association) explored nonacademic components of school readiness and addressed how childcare providers can help parents prepare children for the nonacademic components of kindergarten. An archive of this webinar is available on the [IES YouTube Channel](#).

In 2017, REL Midwest is producing public television documentaries as part of an effort to engage a wider audience around education research. In Cleveland, REL Midwest is working with WVIZ/PBS ideastream on a program about academic supports for English learners, focusing on examples from CMSD. REL Midwest is partnering with CMSD on a separate research project to analyze the effects of the district's Multilingual Multicultural Education Program on language proficiency and content-area knowledge development for English learners.

In Michigan, Detroit Public Television and the REL Midwest Alliance to Improve Teacher Preparation are collaborating on a production about teacher preparation and the experiences of novice teachers, grounding the discussion about research on these topics in stories from urban and suburban schools. REL Midwest will host in-person screenings for each of these programs in Cleveland and Detroit later in the year.

Keep an eye on our [Twitter feed](#) and [website](#) to learn about more about upcoming webinars, in-person events, and public television screenings from REL Midwest in 2017!

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## Have an education research question? Ask A REL!

Do you need research-based resources on an education topic? Use our Ask A REL service! Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service designed to function much in the same way as a technical reference library. In preparing responses, REL Midwest staff members consult colleagues who have content expertise in the area, other RELs, and resources such as ERIC. Following established search protocols, we provide quick-turnaround responses to your questions in the form of referrals and references. Submit your question today on the [IES website](#).

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## Recap of the 2017 AERA Annual Meeting

From April 27 to May 1, REL Midwest staff attended the American Educational Research Association's (AERA's) annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. We certainly kept busy at the conference! In addition to learning from and networking with other dedicated education researchers, our team held nine presentations. Our presentations focused on research-practice partnerships and findings from REL Midwest projects from the 2012–17 contract on topics ranging from quality rating and improvement systems to student engagement in online courses.

## Contact Us

Please contact us for more information about any of the items in this newsletter or to speak to a member of our staff. We look forward to hearing from you.

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This material was prepared under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0007 by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, administered by American Institutes for Research. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.