



Message from the director

Welcome to the new Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest at American Institutes for Research 2017-2022 contract! As we start our third month of work on this five-year contract, we are in full start-up mode. We have five major research partnerships with members (more on the partnerships in the [video](#) below) convening for the first time and negotiating long-term research agendas while also planning out their first 18 months of work. Our emergent partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District has a research study in development and is planning how best to leverage the REL Midwest work to secure additional funding to launch a sustainable research alliance for the district. In addition, we are planning emergent work with leadership teams at the Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio Departments of Education.

It is an exciting time full of enthusiastic conversations about the many possibilities for meaningful, relevant work with our engaged stakeholders. It also is a busy time as project planning progresses in tandem with the many conversations we are having to recruit and convene partners. By the second quarter of this year, we will have research agendas that will serve as roadmaps for the work of our major partnerships moving forward. We also will have early projects in the works that will provide us with insights to guide our future efforts.

We value this journey with you as our partner in this important work. Take a few minutes to read this first newsletter as an introduction to REL Midwest's various initiatives under the new contract, and stay tuned for more updates each month.—**Julie Kochanek, Ph.D.**

Get to know REL Midwest

Watch our [short animated video](#) to learn about REL Midwest's work in the 2017-2022 contract!



State liaisons available to discuss opportunities to work with REL Midwest

REL Midwest's state liaisons serve as key points of contact for professional associations, nonprofits, state education agencies, governors' offices, and members of the states' legislatures. Our state liaisons work to make sure that those stakeholders in the region who are not currently involved in our collaborative research partnerships take advantage of the free research, coaching, training, and technical support that REL Midwest can provide. In addition to connecting stakeholders with REL Midwest support, our state liaisons work to stay informed of the states' ever-changing policy landscapes to anticipate needs. REL Midwest's state liaisons look forward to scheduling visits and forming many more short- and long-term collaborative research partnerships throughout each of our seven states over the next five years. **Please let us know if you would like to schedule a meeting to learn more about REL Midwest's work or to discuss an immediate research need by contacting Carrie Scholz at cscholz@air.org or (414) 267-7849.**

New service evaluates education studies with ESSA levels of evidence

REL Midwest is offering a new service to states in its region in the 2017-2022 contract: reviewing studies to determine how they measure up against the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) levels of evidence. ESSA requires education leaders to factor research evidence into their decisions about activities, strategies, or other interventions designed to improve student outcomes. This research evidence must meet a level of evidence established under ESSA: strong, moderate, or promising. These levels of evidence indicate the type and quality of the study and its findings. REL Midwest will support states by reviewing requested studies to determine if they meet one of the three levels of evidence and, if so, which level. All the RELs will offer this service to the states in their respective regions. **Please contact REL Midwest director Julie Kochanek at jkochanek@air.org or (312) 283-2312 if you would like to work with REL Midwest to evaluate an education study.**

Latest publications from REL Midwest

[Strategies for estimating teacher supply and demand using student and teacher data](#)

(December 2016)

This report summarizes the four-step process that the Minnesota Department of Education and REL Midwest followed in redesigning the state's teacher supply and demand study to increase its utility for stakeholders.

[State strategies to facilitate adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities](#)

(January 2017)

This study catalogs the array of strategies that Midwest states use to support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities.

Characteristics and postsecondary pathways of students who participate in acceleration programs in Minnesota (February 2017)

This study examines participation in the various acceleration programs available to Minnesota high school students, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate coursework, postsecondary enrollment options, concurrent enrollment, and other/unknown programs.

The “I” in QRIS Survey: Collecting data on quality improvement activities for early childhood education programs (February 2017)

This survey is intended for state education agencies that want to collect data on the quality improvement activities and strategies used by early childhood education programs that are participating in a quality rating and improvement system.

Impacts of Ramp-Up to Readiness™ after one year of implementation (March 2017)

This study examined whether the Ramp-Up to Readiness program (Ramp-Up) produced impacts on high school students' college enrollment actions and personal college readiness following one year of program implementation. The study also looked at Ramp-Up's impact on more immediate outcomes, such as the emphasis placed on college readiness and the amount of college-related teacher-student interactions taking place in high schools.

Postsecondary education expectations and attainment of rural and nonrural students (March 2017)

This study examined rural-nonrural differences in postsecondary educational expectations, the attainment of expectations for grade 10 students attending rural and nonrural high schools in the REL Midwest region, and how these differences compare with rural-nonrural differences in the rest of the nation.

Quality improvement efforts among early childhood education programs participating in Iowa's Quality Rating System (March 2017)

This study examined the use and outcomes of quality improvement activities among early childhood education programs participating in the Iowa Quality Rating System.

Reflections from a professional learning community for researchers working in research alliances (March 2017)

This publication shares lessons learned about the common challenges that REL Midwest researchers brought to a professional learning community, the strategies they identified to address the challenges, and the tools used to ultimately overcome those shared challenges. The lessons highlighted in this document are observations made by the professional learning community members and senior REL Midwest staff during the 2012-2017 REL contract.

Federal network of research and technical assistance centers

The REL Program is part of a larger network of research and technical assistance centers funded through the U.S. Department of Education. These centers work closely with one another to align efforts and connect state education agencies (SEAs), districts, and schools with current education research and high-quality resources.

- The [Institute of Education Sciences](#) provides rigorous education research, evaluation, and statistics through four centers: the [National Center for Education Research](#), [National Center for Education Statistics](#), [National Center for Special Education Research](#), and [National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance](#). This last center houses the REL Program as well as the following other useful research resources:
 - The [What Works Clearinghouse](#) provides research reviews, intervention reports, and research-based products to help educators make evidence-based decisions.
 - [ERIC](#) is a free online database of more than 1.5 million education research articles, including links to related information and products.
- The [Comprehensive Centers Program](#) consists of 15 regional centers and seven content centers.
 - The regional centers build the capacity of SEAs to implement and sustain statewide initiatives and to support districts and schools in improving student outcomes. In the

Midwest region, the [Great Lakes Comprehensive Center](#) serves Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, and the [Midwest Comprehensive Center](#) serves Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. [Watch this short video to learn](#) more about some promising approaches that these and other comprehensive centers are using to help close achievement gaps in Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, and Texas.

- The content centers focus on specific areas of expertise, including [college and career readiness and success](#), [great teachers and leaders](#), [innovations in learning](#), and [school turnaround](#).
- Four regional [Equity Assistance Centers](#), funded under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, assist public school districts in the areas of race, gender, national origin, and religion to promote equal education opportunities. The [Great Lakes Equity Center](#) serves the states in the Midwest region.
- The [Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network](#) comprises centers and projects funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to provide information and technical assistance on a range of special education topics, including parenting children with special needs, positive behavior support, and dispute resolution.

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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