



Message from the partnership facilitator and research liaisons

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest is working with the Central Rivers Area Education Agency (AEA) in north-central Iowa to develop and facilitate a networked improvement community (NIC) focused on improving the fidelity and rigor of integration of learning technologies to support classroom instruction. A NIC brings together stakeholders to solve a problem of practice using rapid continuous improvement cycles (Plan-Do-Study-Act). Using this approach, the NIC studies the effects of small-scale interventions that focus on a single aspect of the defined problem.



In conjunction with the REL Midwest team, the Central Rivers AEA worked to unpack data and narrative observations around how teachers were, and were not, using technology in classrooms. With several one-to-one districts and schools (i.e., one computing device for every student) across the AEA, and many technology resources, the group of leaders from Central Rivers sought to explore why most technology integration merely featured an app or a device substituting a part of a lesson or activity that previously would have been done with analog, or non-digital, resources. They wanted to figure out a way to get more teachers to redefine instruction and teach in a way previously inconceivable without the infusion of innovative technology.



In spring 2017, the REL Midwest team facilitated a root-cause analysis to unpack this problem. Through that structured exercise, the NIC landed

on two root causes: (1) the vision and expectations for technology integration across the AEA are not clearly articulated to practitioners, and (2) educators lack sufficient capacity-building opportunities to develop expertise in technology-infused, transformative teaching.

At a face-to-face convening in September 2017, the NIC developed a theory of action around one of the root causes that will drive the development of interventions and research methods and instruments to study the effects of that intervention. Following that, the NIC will kick off its first Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle in which practitioners will employ the intervention in schools, collect data, and work with the REL Midwest team to analyze the data and make decisions about what to do next.

The timing of this NIC is advantageous for many reasons, not the least of which is its alignment to current efforts in Iowa to develop a statewide digital learning plan. The Iowa Department of Education and several AEAs are articulating the state's vision for how the recommendations and ideas presented in the U.S. Department of Education's [2016 National Educational Technology Plan](#) can be put into action in Iowa.

We look forward to the work ahead and invite you to learn more about the NIC, continuous improvement research, and the use of education technology in Iowa. —**Tori Cirks, partnership facilitator, and Marshal Conley and Jonathan Margolin, research liaisons**

A partner in continuous improvement: Central Rivers Area Education Agency

Iowa's AEAs work to ensure the provision of equitable and high-quality education services across the state. Learn more about these agencies and the role of the Central Rivers AEA in the Iowa NIC.

[Read more](#) ➔

Upcoming documentary connects the research on education technology to stories from Iowa

REL Midwest has been working with Iowa Public Television to produce a short, documentary-style program on the research on education technology, highlighting examples from Iowa schools. This article previews what the upcoming program will cover.

[Read more](#) ➔

Meet the NIC member: Michelle Cowell

Michelle Cowell is an instructional technology consultant for the Central Rivers AEA in Iowa. Cowell tells us how she anticipates the work of the Iowa NIC will complement the AEA's efforts to improve technology integration in rural districts.

[Read more](#) ➔

Collaboration for success: Networked improvement communities

Did you know REL Midwest has previous experience with NICs and continuous improvement research? Read this article to learn about past work that informs our approach to the Iowa NIC.

[Read more](#) ➔

Education technology and continuous improvement resources and events

A number of high-quality resources related to continuous improvement and education technology are available online. We curated the following resources, including several from REL Midwest.

[Read more](#) 

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.