Professional Learning
West Virginia

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has West Virginia fostered effective professional learning state-wide for all educators on its college- and career-readiness standards, K-12, in English language arts (ELA) and math?

SREB researchers gathered information on efforts in West Virginia, particularly at the West Virginia Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives (NxG CSOs)**. In collaboration with SREB states and national experts, SREB identified a set of expected state actions — "look-fors" — in **four areas of state leadership in professional learning**. The researchers reviewed online sources and interviewed department leaders and educators to assess the state's efforts.

State efforts in each area fell into one of three levels of implementation:

- *Minimal*, indicating state leadership addresses some of the look-fors

- *Essential*, indicating state leadership addresses the look-fors SREB considers necessary for providing leadership and supporting local efforts

- *Strong*, indicating that in addition to the necessary look-fors, state leadership offers substantial support to foster quality and consistency statewide

The *Project Overview and Look-Fors* document and state profile reports are available on the project Web page.

Highlights for West Virginia

- <u>Strong expectations for professional learning</u>. West Virginia adopted robust statewide standards for professional learning and launched the Transforming Professional Learning statewide initiative.

- <u>Strong support for flexibility for innovation</u>. Schools may apply to become innovation zones to implement certain flexibilities to enhance professional learning and teacher leadership. Through the Reimagined Time pilot initiative, districts can apply to the state board of education to implement flexible school-year or school-day calendars for three years, beginning in 2016-17, to increase and enhance professional learning.

- <u>Notable training for school leaders on maximizing time for professional learning</u>. In 2014-15, the state's Regional Education Service Agencies provided training for leaders from five volunteer Catalyst Schools on maximizing time in the school day and year to increase and enhance professional learning. In 2015-16, 25 more schools became Catalyst Schools, and the West Virginia Department of Education plans to expand the approach statewide.

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1   Establish Clear Expectations

Has the state established clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on the state standards through state professional learning standards or other policy documents?

West Virginia provides *strong* support.

- West Virginia adopted Learning Forward's 2011 Standards for Professional Learning, which are widely accepted as embodying expectations that are rigorous, research-based, comprehensive and outcomes-oriented for educators and students.
- In 2012, the state board of education adopted a statewide definition of professional development.
- In 2015-16, the department launched the Transforming Professional Learning initiative.

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2   Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support

Does the state education agency provide information, guidance, tools, direct assistance and other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation, to support local efforts to deliver high-quality, college- and career-readiness standards-aligned professional learning that meets the needs of all teachers in service of all students?

"The Master Plan for Statewide Professional Learning supports our shift to school- and teacher-driven professional learning, rather than provider-driven professional development. This effort involves protecting teachers' time so they can engage in collaborative learning teams."

— West Virginia Department of Education staff member

Guidance and tools

West Virginia provides *essential* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - Standards for High Quality Schools framework for school improvement, a self-assessment rubric and an online data collection system for monitoring progress
  - West Virginia Support for Improving Professional Practice (WVSIPP) planning tools and best practices
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Extensive sets of exemplars and resources, including videos of exemplary instruction, planning tools, courses, and a Principal's Toolkit
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State law requires districts to provide training and support for beginning educators on the NxG CSOs. To support local induction program development, the department provides a sample program plan, a list of best practices and resources from external organizations.
  - State law requires new principals to participate in the Center for Professional Development's yearlong Principals' Leadership Academy. It also requires districts to provide yearlong internships for new principals. The board developed guidelines to support local program development.

Technical assistance

West Virginia provides *essential* support.

- The department focuses its technical assistance efforts on schools and districts in need of improvement. Support includes diagnostic site visits using the Standards for High Quality Schools framework, school improvement coordinators who assist in developing and implementing WVSIPP plans, and biannual Priority School Leadership Team Conferences.
- In 2015-16, to support the Transforming Professional Learning initiative, West Virginia's Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) and Center for Professional Development work with schools and all 55 districts to plan and implement collaborative professional learning designs and flexible school calendars and schedules. The department assists schools and districts in leveraging existing funding, staff and expertise to enhance professional learning.
- The department meets quarterly with chief instructional leaders and professional learning coordinators from all districts to provide support for data analysis, problem-solving and implementing the NxG CSOs and Standards for Professional Learning.

- To support the state's <u>Campaign for Grade Level Reading</u>, in 2014-15, the department provided training for district leaders and feedback on all district early literacy action plans.

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

West Virginia provides *strong* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand resources: <u>Teach21</u> (soon to be the Teacher Resources for Educational Excellence, TREE) site), <u>Digital Library</u>, ELA and math Web pages, <u>WVLearns</u> eLearning courses and <u>Principal's Perspective</u> Web page
  - Learning management system: Educational Impact online system allows teachers to access resources, based on their needs, that are aligned to the state teacher evaluation standards. In 2014-15, approximately one-third of the state's 727 schools participated in the pilot, which is expanding in 2015-16.
- Policies and opportunities to foster flexibility and innovation in professional learning
  - According to the School Innovation Zones Act of 2009, schools or groups of schools may apply for grant funding to become innovation zones, which can waive certain policies, rules and statutory constraints. The department provides ideas for using flexibility to enhance professional learning.
  - In fall 2015, the department commissioned a stakeholder group to help revise board policy on the school calendar to provide more flexibility for professional learning.
  - Through the statewide pilot <u>Reimagined Time initiative</u>, districts can apply to implement flexible school-year or school-day calendars for three years, beginning in 2016-17, to improve professional learning. To support district planning, in 2015-16, the department hosts quarterly meetings and webinars.

3 Offer Professional Learning

Does the state education agency offer coordinated professional learning opportunities that develop educators' understanding of the state standards and skills to implement them — and that build local capacity to lead high-quality professional learning for all educators?

Context: In response to Senate Bill 359 of 2013, the department developed the <u>Transforming Professional Learning</u> initiative in collaboration with the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Learning Forward, and a stakeholder advisory group. The initiative launched in 2015-16 with funding from the Benedum Foundation. This initiative shifts West Virginia from a centralized system of professional development based on large-scale institutes provided by the department and external partners, to a school-based model of continual learning. The change limits the department's role in providing training. RESAs now play a major role in disseminating state resources and providing training and support to districts and schools.

West Virginia provides *essential* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - In 2014-15, the department began working with SREB on a three-year Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) project to certify trainers and train teachers in pilot schools, with plans to scale LDC and MDC practices in all secondary schools.
  - The department works with SREB to train teachers in participating districts on SREB's Literacy and Math Ready courses for 11th- and 12th-graders who are not yet college and career ready.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - In 2014-15, the RESAs provided support for leaders from five volunteer Catalyst Schools and focused on maximizing time in the school day and year for professional

learning. In 2015-16, 25 more schools joined. The department plans to expand this approach to all schools in the state.

– According to state law, the Center for Professional Development is responsible for providing professional learning for district leaders.

4 Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

Does the state education agency use data to inform its planning and leadership of statewide professional learning, and does it provide feedback to local leaders and hold districts accountable for excellence in local professional learning?

Funding for professional learning in 2014-15 and 2015-16:

West Virginia used or is using state funds, including Campaign for Grade Level Reading funds, federal funds and grants from the Benedum Foundation, the National Governors Association and Mathematics and Science Partnerships.

West Virginia undertakes *essential* work in this area.

- Using data more effectively is a focus for the department in 2015-16.

- The department uses a centralized approach to data usage. The annual Master Plan for Statewide Professional Learning guides the department's efforts. The professional learning advisory council (made up of department leaders and representatives from RESAs, the Center for Professional Development and higher education) meets regularly to discuss implementation and recommend improvements. In July 2015, the department convened district leaders to identify needs and monitor local implementation. Regional meetings continue in 2016.

- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably, the department has conducted evaluations of key professional learning initiatives, including evaluations of the annual Master Plan for Statewide Professional Learning and a 2013-14 study of RESA trainings. However, these evaluations do not include rigorous examination of the impacts of professional learning on teacher knowledge and practice or student outcomes, a crucial step in understanding the effects of state efforts.

- In providing feedback to local leaders and accountability for excellence:

  – The department provides feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts through annual progress reports on schools in need of improvement. It also offers reviews of district WVSIPP and Campaign for Grade Level Reading plans, regular meetings with district superintendents and leaders, and onsite audits of a sample of schools each year — with a goal for audits to reach every district on a four-year cycle.

  – Department leaders expect schools and districts to leverage the support and funding they receive to make continuous improvement on school and district professional learning systems. Additionally, the department provides findings from its evaluations of the Master Plan for Statewide Professional Learning to the state Legislature.

MOVING FORWARD: Practices for West Virginia to consider

- Provide educators with more **online, on-demand tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning** and **exemplars of professional learning**, such as archived materials from high-quality professional learning programs. These tools can serve as immediate learning resources and models for local leaders as they develop professional learning systems. See guidance, tools and exemplars noted in the Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina profiles.

- Explore ways to provide more **coordinated, comprehensive technical assistance — and professional learning where large gaps exist in local expertise — to local leadership teams**. This would support the long-term work of building deep and broad capacity in schools and districts to implement high-quality professional learning for all educators. See work with local leadership teams noted in the Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky and Louisiana profiles.

- Undertake more **comprehensive program evaluations** to analyze the efficacy of professional learning initiatives — in particular, their impacts on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes — to help identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones. See program evaluations noted in the Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee profiles.

All related state profiles and reports are on the project Web page.