Professional Learning
Kentucky

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Kentucky fostered effective professional learning statewide 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 Kentucky, particularly at the Kentucky Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS)**. 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 Kentucky

- **Strong expectations for professional learning** through adoption of robust professional learning standards and reform guided by legislators, the state board of education and the Professional Learning Task Force

- **Strong guidance and tools to support high-quality, effective local professional learning,** including a Professional Learning Guidance manual, a Guide for Evaluating the Impact of Professional Development and an Innovation Configuration Map

- **Strong professional learning offerings**. Teachers and leaders from all 173 districts participate in Leadership Networks to develop knowledge of the Kentucky Academic Standards and build the capacity to design, implement and evaluate high-quality professional learning.

- **Strong use of data to inform state efforts**. The Kentucky Department of Education's Delivery Unit builds the agency's capacity in project management, data analysis and data-driven decision-making. The department recently conducted evaluations of two professional learning programs, one of which examined the impact of the training on student outcomes. Such information helps state leaders identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones.

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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?

Kentucky provides *strong* support.

- Kentucky 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 2014, the state board of education revised the regulation on professional development and established a statewide definition of professional learning. This change supported Senate Bill 1 of 2009 and required districts to designate a professional development coordinator to ensure implementation fidelity. This work was guided by Kentucky's Professional Learning Task Force, a statewide stakeholder group representing schools, districts and education-related organizations.

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, aligned professional learning that meets the needs of all teachers in service of all students?

Guidance and tools

Kentucky provides *strong* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - Innovation Configuration Map, a guide for implementing the KAS and professional learning within the context of highly effective teaching, learning and assessment practices
  - Kentucky Professional Learning Guidance manual, a Guide for Evaluating the Impact of Professional Development, and Reflection Tools to support planning, implementation and evaluation of professional learning
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Best Practices Searchable Database of district and school best practices vetted by the department
  - Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) resources
  - Extensive sets of resources from the Leadership Networks
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State law requires new teachers to participate in a yearlong internship program. To assist local leaders in developing programs aligned to the state teaching standards and the KAS, the state's Education Professional Standards Board provides implementation and training resources, and the department recommends resources.

Technical assistance

Kentucky provides *strong* support.

- The department's Leadership Networks provide structured, regular technical assistance and support to leadership teams from all 173 districts to complement the professional learning activities of the networks.
- To support local improvement, the department offers consultants who provide feedback on each school's comprehensive school improvement plan. The department also offers Title II consultants who provide feedback on comprehensive district improvement plans and district Title II plans.
- The department's 16 regional instructional specialists partner with Kentucky's regional educational cooperatives to support school and district leaders in designing and implementing professional learning. Support varies across the cooperatives to meet local needs, based on regional capacity.

"Our professional learning guidance and tools are intended to help everyone understand the shifts we're trying to implement around professional learning. We provide concrete resources and steps for educators to take as they engage in that transformation, which asks them to look at professional learning more systematically and with an eye toward how it impacts educator effectiveness and student success."

— Kentucky Department of Education staff member

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Kentucky provides *essential* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand resources: KDE Media Portal video library of exemplary KAS implementation and Google+ Web page for Leadership Network resources
  - Learning management system: The Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS) allows educators to manage their professional growth plans, access resources, and monitor student and educator performance data
- Policies and opportunities to foster flexibility and innovation
  - Districts can apply to be districts of innovation to improve professional learning. The department assesses district innovation plans, and the board approves waivers.
  - According to state law, districts may implement flexible professional learning schedules and report changes to the department.

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

- Between 2011 and 2015, Kentucky served as Learning Forward's demonstration state for creating a comprehensive professional learning system to implement college- and career-readiness standards. Kentucky worked with Learning Forward and other partners, including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, to develop a system based on district leadership teams. Six other states, including Georgia, contributed to the effort as supporters, by providing feedback and ideas as Kentucky developed its plans.
- Kentucky's regional education cooperatives facilitate the majority of direct training and technical assistance that educators receive. Based on the department's theory of change that local leaders are best able to affect meaningful change and to expand the impact of the department's small staff, the department collaborates with the cooperatives to design and deliver its professional learning offerings.
- Kentucky has used several funding streams, including private grants, to support its flagship professional learning initiative, the Leadership Networks, making it sustainable even in the face of major funding shifts, such as the end of the Race to the Top (RTTT) grant in 2014.

Kentucky provides *strong* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - The department's Leadership Networks provide district leadership teams long-term, comprehensive and coordinated support that equips the teams with knowledge and skills to implement the KAS. These networks also build the teams' capacity to lead high-quality professional learning in their sites. Since 2010-11, all districts have designated a leadership team of three or four school leaders, three or four district leaders and several teachers. Team members participate in intensive professional learning over a three-year period in monthly role-specific, full-day, face-to-face network meetings and ongoing face-to-face and virtual follow-up sessions. Team members then lead professional learning and provide support in their schools and districts. In 2010-11 through 2012-13, the networks focused on ELA and math. In 2011-12 through 2013-14, the networks focused on early childhood. Since 2013-14, the networks have focused on science and social studies. Though trained ELA and math teachers have cycled out of participation in the networks, the department expects them to continue to support professional learning efforts in their schools and districts.

"Our goal was to create a district leadership team in every district that has the skills, resources and capacity to implement our KAS within the context of highly effective teaching, learning and assessment practices for every student every day."

— Kentucky Department of Education staff member

- The department provides statewide LDC and MDC trainings and coaches for ELA, math and content area teachers.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - Through the Instructional Support Leadership Network, school and district leaders serve on their district leadership teams and participate in role-specific activities to enhance their leadership of the KAS.
  - Through its LEAD-Kentucky initiative, in 2014-15, the department selected a cadre of principals and district staff to study leadership skills, content knowledge and standards implementation. In June 2015, these leaders began serving as trainers for additional cadres.
  - In partnership with the Center for Education Leadership and the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, the department provides the Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA), which offers ongoing training for school and district leaders to build local capacity for school improvement. In 2014-15, KLA served over 700 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?

Kentucky undertakes *strong* work in this area.

- The department uses a systematic, centralized approach to data usage. The department's Delivery Unit builds the agency's capacity in project management, data analysis and data-driven decision-making. The department developed a research plan for each priority in its strategic plan, and the Delivery Unit monitors progress. Unit staff members participate in cross-functional teams as part of the agency's overall strategic planning process. A statewide teacher advisory council also provides the commissioner with input on progress and needs.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably in 2015, it published findings from an external evaluation of its 2012-13 LDC and MDC implementation. The evaluation found positive and significant student outcomes on the statewide ELA and math assessment, the ACT PLAN test and an LDC and MDC instrument. Such information helps state leaders identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones. Additionally, the department conducted an internal evaluation of CIITS implementation with RTTT funds.
- In providing feedback to local leaders and accountability for excellence:
  - The department provides direct, real-time feedback to local leaders on their efforts through its regional instructional specialists and as part of its work with district teams through the Leadership Networks initiative.
  - Department leaders expect schools and districts to leverage the support and funding they receive for professional learning to make continuous improvement on school and district professional learning systems.

MOVING FORWARD: Practices for Kentucky to consider

- Explore ways to **extend the intensive supports previously provided to ELA and math teachers**. These groups of teachers cycled out of participation on their district leadership teams in 2013-14 when the Leadership Networks shifted focus to other content areas and topics. See work with local leadership teams noted in the Alabama, Delaware and Louisiana profiles.
- Continue the Kentucky Department of Education's strong work in undertaking **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 North Carolina and Tennessee profiles.

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