

Professional Learning Virginia

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Virginia 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 Virginia, particularly at the Virginia Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Standards of Learning (SOL)**. 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 to assess the state's efforts. The department provided feedback on the report as SREB researchers prepared it.

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 Virginia

- The Virginia Department of Education [provides tools to support local leadership teams as they prepare for the state academic review process](#). The review process helps leaders in schools and divisions (called districts in other states) analyze factors that affect student achievement, including professional development. Findings from reviews inform improvement planning.
- The department and the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center are [piloting professional learning on formative assessment practices](#) for teams from volunteer schools in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

1 Establish Clear Expectations

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

Virginia provides *essential* support.

- In 2004, the state board of education adopted the High-Quality Professional Development Criteria, which require that professional development be based on, aligned with and directly related to the state learning standards.

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?

Guidance and tools

Virginia provides *minimal* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
 - Academic review evaluation tools, including an Alignment and Basic Components Evaluation Tool at the school and division (called districts in other states) levels, and archived presentations and guidance to help school and division leaders analyze factors that affect student achievement and teacher professional development and prepare for the state academic review process
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
 - Archived presentations and materials from the department’s annual SOL institutes
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
 - State law requires divisions to provide induction programs for new teachers, and the department’s Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs requires that programs help teachers develop knowledge and skills on the SOL to improve student performance. To support local program development, the department provides a tool, Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Mentor Programs in Hard-to-Staff Schools, and a manual, Stepping Stones, for beginning and mentor teachers. Virginia also provides divisions \$1 million annually to support mentoring programs for pre-service and beginning teachers.

Technical assistance

Virginia provides *minimal* support.

- For schools in need of improvement and their divisions, the department provides intensive, targeted technical assistance. Department staff work with local leaders, providing feedback on improvement plans and conducting academic reviews that include monitoring professional development, identifying recommendations for improvement, and providing other assistance as needed.

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Virginia provides *essential* support.

- Technology
 - Repositories of online, on-demand professional learning resources: TeacherDirect catalog of department professional learning and eMediaVA professional development courses

- Policies and opportunities to foster flexibility and innovation in professional learning
 - Charter schools may be approved to waive certain state rules or regulations to improve professional learning.
 - Flexible scheduling opportunities: In 2015, the state Legislature provided funding for planning grants for divisions interested in implementing year-round school programs in 2016-17 to improve professional learning. The Legislature also authorized start-up grants to assist divisions in establishing year-round or extended-year school programs for 2015-16 or 2016-17.

3 Offer Professional Learning

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

Context: The department is the main provider of state-sponsored professional learning and technical assistance for educators, schools and divisions in Virginia. To enhance its programs and services, in 2015-16 the department funded two new staff positions focused on state-provided professional development. Virginia does not have regional education centers to provide services locally. To maximize the reach and impact of its small staff, the department focuses its efforts on schools and divisions in need of improvement. The department also engages in partnerships with external entities, such as institutions of higher education, professional associations and nonprofit organizations, which all provide some support to divisions and schools. For example, the department partners with institutions of higher education to operate training and technical assistance centers that provide training and support to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Virginia provides *essential* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
 - The department provides annual fall SOL institutes (since 2009 for math and 2012 for ELA) in which teachers and leaders statewide can participate voluntarily. The institutes provide information on and tools for implementing the SOL.
 - The department uses its Mathematics and Science Partnerships grant to fund local partnerships, for example, between high-need divisions and institutions of higher education, to provide teacher training.
 - The department and the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center are piloting professional learning on formative assessment practices for teams from volunteer schools in 2014-15 and 2015-16. The pilot includes a statewide meeting, online training modules and regular school-based meetings. Based on lessons from this pilot, the department intends to expand this effort statewide.
 - Since 2010, through its Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports, the department has offered yearlong, cohort-based programs for divisions selected through an application process. Teachers in selected divisions participate in professional learning to support implementation of strategies to improve academic, behavioral and emotional learning.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
 - In partnership with the College of William & Mary, the department provides professional development liaisons to divisions with schools in need of improvement. The training focuses on implementing the SOL and leading local professional development.

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

Virginia used or is using state funds, federal funds and a Mathematics and Science Partnerships grant.

- In partnership with professional associations and institutions of higher education, the department provides a two-day professional development summit on developing local student performance assessments aligned to the SOL for non-tested grades and subjects.
- In collaboration with the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, the department offers annual, statewide middle and high school principal conferences that include sessions on the SOL for school and division leaders.
- School and division leaders can participate in the SOL institutes.
- Staff in divisions participating in the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports participate in professional learning and follow-up events, and receive coaching to assist with implementation of reforms that support academic, behavioral and emotional learning.

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?

Virginia undertakes essential work in this area.

- Department leaders for core content areas analyze student performance data to guide professional development planning.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably in 2015-16, the department commissioned a formal program evaluation of its formative assessment pilot program. While noteworthy, this evaluation plan does not include rigorous examination of the impacts of the training on teacher outcomes beyond teacher self-reflection or student outcomes, crucial data for understanding the effects of professional learning efforts.
- In providing feedback to local leaders and accountability for excellence:
 - The department provides direct feedback to local leaders of schools and divisions in need of improvement on their professional learning efforts through the academic review process.
 - Department leaders expect schools and divisions to leverage the support and funding they receive for professional learning to make continuous improvement on school and division professional learning systems.

MOVING FORWARD:
Practices for 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 and exemplars 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, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina profiles.
- Explore ways to provide **coordinated, comprehensive technical assistance and professional learning to local leadership teams**. This would support the long-term work of building deep and broad capacity in schools and divisions (called districts in other states) 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](#).