# Professional Learning
## Delaware

*In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Delaware 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 Delaware, particularly at the Delaware Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Common Core State Standards**. 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 Delaware

- **Strong guidance and tools**, including a School-Level Common Core Implementation Plan Rubric, Progress and Capacity Site Visit Rubric, implementation survey and numerous professional learning exemplars

- **Strong technical assistance** for local leaders, including annual Common Core site visits to one school from every district, annual progress reviews and performance evaluations for all districts, and monthly meetings with ELA and math specialists (Literacy and Math Cadres) and with directors of instruction or assessment (Teaching and Learning Cadre) in all districts

- **Strong professional learning offerings**. Over three years, teachers, principals and district leaders in 136 of Delaware's 225 schools from 18 of its 19 districts have participated in the Common Ground for the Common Core initiative. Through the initiative, they develop knowledge of the Common Core State Standards and build local capacity to design and implement high-quality professional learning. Also, nearly 60 principals participate in the Learning Leader Network, a formative classroom observation process focusing on student look-fors and collaborative conversations with teachers to support implementation of the standards.

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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 college- and career-readiness standards through state professional learning standards or other policy documents?*

**Delaware provides *essential* support.**

- Delaware adopted Learning Forward's 2011 Standards for Professional Learning. These standards are widely accepted as embodying expectations that are rigorous, research-based, comprehensive and outcomes-oriented for educators and students.

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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?*

### Guidance and tools

**Delaware provides *strong* support.**

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - Common Ground Planning Tool and School-Level Common Core Implementation Plan Rubric, which include specific guidance to support professional learning
  - Progress and Capacity Site Visit Rubric used during annual district site visits
  - Implementation survey (adapted from Achieve's Implementation Indicators tool)
  - Documenting Progress Through Evidence guide and Common Ground for the Common Core Evidence Placemat, which include specific guidance to support local evaluation of professional learning on the Common Core
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Professional development modules that are organized by grade bands and content areas, with facilitator guides and materials for use at the school and district levels
  - Extensive sets of archived resources from the Common Ground for the Common Core initiative
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State law requires new teachers and administrators to participate in a three-year induction program. To assist local leaders in developing programs aligned to the Common Core and the state teacher and leader evaluation standards, the department provides program frameworks, exemplar training materials, some as-needed support for districts and training opportunities for program participants.

### Technical assistance

**Delaware provides *strong* support.**

- Schools and districts that voluntarily participate in the department's Common Ground for the Common Core initiative receive intensive technical assistance and training on identifying needs and delivering professional learning and monitoring its effectiveness.
- The department conducts an annual Common Core site visit to one school in every district. Using the Progress and Capacity Site Visit Rubric and gathering data from classroom observations, document analysis, educator interviews and focus groups with students and parents, department staff assess local progress on Common Core implementation and professional learning. After the visit, the department provides a findings and recommendations report to local leaders.
- Department staff meets monthly with ELA and math content specialists (called the Literacy and Math Cadre) from all districts and with district directors of instruction or assessment (called the Teaching and Learning Cadre) to share information, provide training and facilitate collaboration and resource development.

*"The Common Core site visits we conducted this year were a major eye-opener. We definitely saw some bright spots, and the visits also helped us see where we need to focus."*

— Delaware Department of Education staff member

- Beginning in 2015-16, the department provides customized support to all 19 districts based on school accountability status (with the most intensive support provided to schools in most need of improvement), annual progress reviews (onsite visits to all districts) and performance evaluations (using data dashboards).

### Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

**Delaware provides *essential* support.**

- Technology
  - Repositories of online, on-demand professional learning resources: ELA and math pages on the department's website
  - Learning management system: Schoology software enables teachers to access resources to provide students with blended and personalized learning experiences. In 2015-16, the system is available to all educators. Fifteen districts and nine charter schools are using the system with students and the department plans on expanding it.
- 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.

## 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?*

"The Learning Leader Network will help our principals to deepen implementation of the Common Core, as well as strengthen implementation of other content areas."

— Delaware Department of Education staff member

### Context

- Delaware is a small state with 19 districts and 225 schools. Though the state does not have regional education centers, its small numbers of districts and schools increase the department's ability to engage directly with practitioners statewide. The department is the main provider of training and technical assistance, although it does work with partners, such as the University of Delaware, which provide some local support.
- Though Delaware's flagship initiative, Common Ground for the Common Core, began as a part of the state's Race to the Top (RTTT) work, aspects of its design and its priority for state leadership have enabled the department to sustain it after RTTT funding ended in 2015, although other department projects ended with that funding.

**Delaware provides *strong* support.**

- Professional learning for teachers
  - Since 2013-14, through Common Ground for the Common Core, participating schools and districts have received long-term, intensive support for implementing the Common Core and leading high-quality professional learning at their local sites. School and district guiding teams (including teachers, principals and district staff) participate in a cycle of pre-reading and data collection, three-day convenings, school-based planning clinics, meetings to share evidence of progress and plan improvements, and virtual coaching. In 2015-16, teams focus on one of two areas based on need: closing achievement gaps for students with disabilities and English learners, or deepening literacy practices across the content areas. Since 2013-14, 136 of the state's 225 schools, representing 18 out of 19 districts, have participated with 100 schools in 2013-14, 80 in 2014-15 and 40 in 2015-16.
  - In 2014-15, the Delaware Dream Team of 74 selected teachers met throughout the year with department staff to receive professional learning and create instructional resources to share with teachers across the state. In 2015, the department offered the TeachFest Delaware Spring Academy, an optional, daylong session for 200 teachers. Dream Team members helped to facilitate the sessions. In January 2016, the department launched a new cohort of 45 Dream Team members, made up of teachers from all grade levels, that focuses specifically on math.

- The Literacy Cadre has worked extensively with teachers to implement Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) tools and practices and has been nationally recognized for tasks developed by Delaware educators. Beginning in 2015-16, districts and charter schools can partner with SREB to further LDC and Mathematics Design Collaborative work.
- In 2015-16 the department launched two initiatives to help teachers integrate Common Core instructional practices in the content areas: a three-year program for world languages teachers; and a pilot program, provided in partnership with SREB, for career and technical education and math teachers, with plans for expansion in 2016-17.

- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - School and district leaders participate on Common Ground for the Common Core guiding teams.
  - Beginning in 2015-16, nearly 60 principals participate in the Learning Leader Network to support Common Core implementation. Network participants learn about a formative classroom observation process focusing on student look-fors and collaborative conversations with teachers. Participants identify an area of focus and meet as teams during the year in three face-to-face sessions, in virtual follow-up meetings and on their own. Principals form a team at their schools to engage further in the observations.
  - The Literacy, Math, and Teaching and Learning Cadres include professional learning opportunities, as well as technical assistance 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?*

**The department undertakes *essential* work in this area.**

- The department uses a centralized approach to data usage, guided by College and Career Ready Plans that identify key initiatives and strategies to drive improvement. Data analysts support initiative directors who meet regularly to review data and problem-solve.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. However, it has not recently conducted comprehensive program evaluations that 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 direct feedback to all districts on their professional learning efforts through annual progress reviews and Common Core site visits. The department also provides real-time feedback to participating schools and districts in the Common Ground initiative.
  - Department leaders expect schools and districts to leverage the funding and support they receive for professional learning to make continuous improvement on school and district professional learning systems.

*MOVING FORWARD: Practices for Delaware to consider*

- Continue and deepen the Delaware Department of Education's well-coordinated, **comprehensive technical assistance and professional learning for local leadership teams**. This would further 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, 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.**