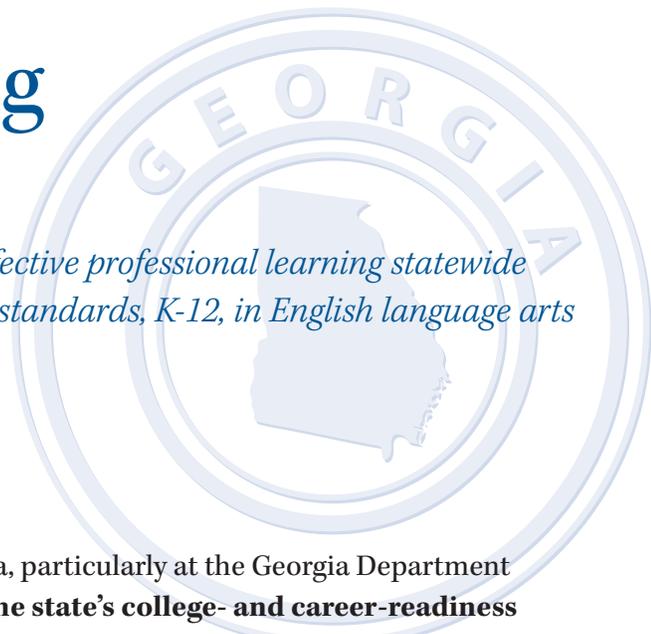


# Professional Learning Georgia

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

- **Strong expectations for professional learning** through adoption of robust standards for professional learning and through expectations articulated in the Georgia School Performance Standards and Georgia District Performance Standards
- **Strong guidance and tools**, including the Georgia School Assessment on Performance Standards (GSAPS) Analysis manual and numerous related resources
- **Strong professional learning exemplars**, including the Georgia Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) blended learning courses and extensive resources on the Teacher Resource Link (TRL) platform and GeorgiaStandards.org

## 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?*

**Georgia provides *strong* support.**

- Georgia 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.
- Additionally, the Georgia School Performance Standards and Georgia District Performance Standards require that professional learning be rigorous and focused on improving educator and student outcomes.

## 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**

**Georgia provides *strong* support.**

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - The Georgia School Performance Standards and Georgia District Performance Standards provide local leaders with guidance and self-assessment rubrics for general school improvement, including specific guidance on planning, implementation and evaluation of professional learning on the GSE.
  - The Georgia School Assessment on Performance Standards (GSAPS) Analysis manual and numerous related tools guide onsite assessment of a school’s progress toward meeting the Georgia School Performance Standards and inform improvement planning, including professional learning.
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Georgia Formative Instructional Practice (FIP) blended learning courses and resources for formative assessment
  - Extensive sets of webinars, videos, virtual courses and instructional planning tools
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - To assist local leaders in developing voluntary, local induction programs for new teachers, the department partnered with districts, institutions of higher education and the state’s Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) to develop guidance and professional learning modules aligned to the state’s educator evaluation standards

**Technical assistance**

**Georgia provides *essential* support.**

- The department focuses its technical assistance efforts on schools in need of improvement, providing intensive support for identifying needs, planning and implementing professional learning, and conducting GSAPS analyses.
- Since summer 2015, the department has partnered with Georgia Learning Forward and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to coordinate a professional learning collaborative for district leaders. The partners meet annually to share resources and best practices on developing and implementing professional learning.
- RESAs offer technical assistance to all districts in the state (with varying types and depths of services). The department meets quarterly with RESA leaders to identify needs and to share information and resources.

“We’ve been extremely pleased with how well the Georgia FIP program has been received by educators. And over 140 of us in the department have an FIP online learning account. So we are building our own knowledge-base in implementing standards-based instruction with fidelity.”

— Georgia Department of Education staff member

“Through the School and District Effectiveness initiative, for the first time in a number of years we’re focused on supporting district professional learning coordinators. And as part of this, our relationship with Learning Forward and the Georgia affiliate is continuing to develop.”

— Georgia Department of Education staff member

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

### Georgia provides essential support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand professional learning resources: [GeorgiaStandards.org](http://GeorgiaStandards.org) and [Georgia FIP](http://GeorgiaFIP) blended learning courses
  - Learning management system: The [Teacher Resource Link \(TRL\)](http://TeacherResourceLink) platform and Truenorthlogic Educator Effectiveness platform allow educators to access resources aligned to their needs and those of their students.
- Policies and opportunities to foster flexibility and innovation in professional learning
  - Charter schools and charter systems may be approved to waive certain state rules or regulations to improve professional learning.
  - Strategic Waivers School System: Similar to charter systems, districts can operate as SWSS/IE2 systems through a contract between the state board of education and local boards of education. These systems 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?*

**Context:** Based on the theory of action that expertise is best developed locally, RESAs and regional Georgia Learning Resources System programs provide the bulk of state-sponsored training and technical assistance directly to educators, schools and districts. The department focuses on providing assistance to schools and districts in need of improvement and on developing online professional learning resources for educators to access on demand to meet local needs. In 2015-16, with the end of Race to the Top (RTTT) funding, the department offers less direct face-to-face training than it did during the years of the grant.

### Georgia provides essential support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - The department provides [Georgia FIP](http://GeorgiaFIP) training on instructional and formative assessment practices in ELA, math and other subjects through a blended learning model comprised of five online courses followed by RESA- or district-led, face-to-face professional learning communities (PLCs). To date, over 42,000 teachers, coaches and school leaders have participated. In 2015-16, the department and RESAs are developing additional resources, including some for differentiating instruction and performance-based assessment.
  - In 2014 and 2015, the department collaborated with the RESAs to provide one- or multiple-day ELA and math summer institutes. In 2014, 4,000 ELA and math teachers attended; in 2015, 1,300 math teachers attended.
  - Since 2011, the department has provided Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) training to RESA consultants and teachers and leaders from over 150 of Georgia’s 180 districts. These consultants, teachers and leaders then provide training and support to local teachers. Beginning in 2015-16, the department partners with SREB to further its LDC and MDC work.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - In 2014-15 and 2015-16, the department has provided fall and winter Instructional Leadership Academy sessions on implementing the GSE and PLCs, monitoring instruction, and providing feedback to teachers.

- Beginning in 2014-15, the department has provided school and district effectiveness training, including individualized support and statewide meetings focused on the GSE, setting learning targets and data analysis.
- The department, in collaboration with several external partners, provides multiple annual leadership conferences for principals, district curriculum leaders and superintendents with targeted sessions on the GSE, professional learning, assessment and accountability.
- School and district leaders can participate in Georgia FIP training.
- School and district leaders can participate in LDC and MDC training.

## 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:

Georgia used or is using state and federal funds, grants, including Race to the Top, Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy and a State Personnel Development Grant, and funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

### Georgia undertakes *essential* work in this area.

- The department uses a centralized approach to data usage. Deputy state superintendents and directors from across the department meet bi-weekly to analyze data, share ideas, coordinate services and set the direction for the state's professional learning. Department staff meet quarterly with RESA leaders to plan and monitor professional learning and to share information.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably in 2014, Georgia commissioned program evaluations of the state's RTTT projects. While noteworthy, these evaluations did not include rigorous examination of the projects' impacts 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 local leaders on their professional learning efforts through its review of district annual consolidated applications for funding, GSAPS analysis for selected schools and districts in need of improvement, and quarterly meetings with RESA leaders.
  - 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 Georgia to consider

- Explore ways to provide more **coordinated, comprehensive technical assistance and professional learning to local leadership teams**. This would support the long-term work of building the capacity of schools and districts to implement high-quality professional learning for all teachers. 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](#).**