Professional Learning
Maryland

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Maryland 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 Maryland, particularly at the Maryland State Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Maryland College and Career-Ready 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 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 Maryland

- **Strong guidance, tools and exemplars**, including the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning and Evaluation Guides, the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework, extensive online professional learning resources, and support for district teacher induction programs

- **Strong technical assistance** for local leaders through onsite district support visits; monthly or quarterly role-specific meetings with leaders in all 24 districts; and intensive support for schools and districts in need of improvement through the Maryland State Department of Education's Breakthrough Center

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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?

Maryland provides *essential* support.

- The department adopted the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards in 2001. In 2011, the department began using the 2011 Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning as guidance for developing its professional learning initiatives and resources. It also encourages districts and schools to use the Learning Forward standards locally. The Learning Forward standards are widely accepted as embodying expectations that are rigorous, research-based, comprehensive and outcomes-oriented for educators and students.

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

Maryland provides *strong* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide
  - Maryland Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide
  - Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework for planning and providing professional learning for school leaders and principal supervisors
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Extensive sets of resources, including model lesson videos, webinars and archived materials from the department's Educator Effectiveness Academies (extensive trainings for teams from schools across the state, offered between 2011 and 2013), and resources for learning about implementation of the state teacher evaluation framework
  - Numerous on-demand, online courses on the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards, and the online course, Online Teaching in Maryland
  - Department-recommended online courses offered by Maryland Public Television
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State law requires districts to provide new teachers with three years of induction support aligned with the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards. Districts must report on the effectiveness of their programs in their annual Bridge to Excellence Master Plans. To support local programs, the department meets quarterly with district program coordinators, and provides resources and mentoring academies for program coordinators and mentors.

Technical assistance

Maryland provides *strong* support.

- By request, district support visits provide targeted assistance to meet local needs. These visits follow up on the in-depth support provided by the department in 2013-14, when staff members conducted Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards support visits in all 24 districts. Department staff met with district leaders, school leaders and teachers, and observed in classrooms to assess progress on standards implementation.
- The state superintendent meets monthly with district superintendents to provide information, address issues, and offer guidance and support. Department staff meet monthly with district assistant superintendents and curriculum content supervisors, and conduct quarterly role-specific meetings with other district leaders, including professional learning coordinators, chief academic officers, principal supervisors and information technology leaders.

"Input from practitioners informs our work. We meet with district leaders, visit schools and classrooms, and talk with teachers in every district in the state. We get lots of feedback, and we base our professional learning opportunities on the needs practitioners express."

— Maryland State Department of Education staff member

- The department's Breakthrough Center works intensively with leaders of schools and districts in need of improvement to identify needs and to design, implement and monitor professional learning.

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Maryland provides *essential* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand professional learning resources: <u>LearnMD</u> portal, Digital Toolkit and Maryland College & Career Readiness Professional Learning Program platform
  - Learning management system: <u>eConnect</u> allows educators to access online resources and register for 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.

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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 takes an active role in providing professional learning and technical assistance in Maryland. The small size of the state and its small number of county-based districts (24) enable department staff to engage directly with educators, schools and districts.
- In 2014-15, with the end of the state's Race to the Top (RTTT) funding, the department reduced the number of staff dedicated to professional learning from seven to three. The department reduced the scale of its professional learning initiatives, shifting from face-to-face Educator Effectiveness Academies for teams from all schools in the state, to regional College and Career Readiness Conferences that individual educators can voluntarily attend. It also began to focus on using more economical formats for delivering professional learning, such as online courses, webinars and EdCamps.

Maryland provides *essential* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - Since 2014, the department has provided regional, two-day, voluntary summer Maryland College and Career Readiness Conferences at postsecondary institutions across the state. Topics have included ELA, math, social studies and science, as well as gifted, special, and English language learner education. Six thousand educators attended eight conferences in 2014, and 4,000 attended five conferences in 2015. Conferences in 2016 are contingent upon grant funding.
  - In February 2015, the department began hosting regional <u>EdCamps</u>, or "unconferences," in which participants design the agenda onsite and lead and participate in sessions based on their needs. These were the first EdCamps sponsored by a state department of education in the nation. Building on its EdCamp success, in November 2015, the department held a half-day <u>PLAYDATE</u> (People Learning and Asking Y: Digital Age Teacher Exploration), led by participants who collaborated on instructional technology strategies. Face-to-face and virtual EdCamps continue in 2016.
  - In partnership with the Maryland Business Roundtable, the department provides the STEM Innovation Network, which includes STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) coaches who offer onsite and online support for teachers.
  - Beginning in 2015-16, the department partners with SREB to implement Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative tools and practices.

"A great strength in our work is that we offer educators a large variety of opportunities for professional learning, provided both face to face and online. And we utilize the expertise of our Master Teachers as leaders of professional learning communities and other kinds of grassroots efforts."

— Maryland State Department of Education staff member

- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - In 2014-15, the department launched the Principal Pipeline to identify, train and support aspiring principals. The annual program includes four multi-day meetings, coaching and networking. Each of the state's 24 districts may send two assistant principals to participate.
  - The department's Breakthrough Center provides its annual two-day Breakthrough Center Academy for School Turnaround for principals and leadership teams at schools in need of improvement and for district staff.
  - Maryland College and Career Readiness Conferences include role-specific sessions for school and 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?

Maryland undertakes *essential* work in this area.

- The department uses a systematic, centralized approach to data usage. The state superintendent meets quarterly with department leaders who then meet quarterly with leaders from all 24 districts in role-specific meetings to analyze data, identify needs, as well as design, implement and monitor professional learning. A cross-functional team within the department meets monthly to identify the specific needs of schools in need of improvement and to design and implement support through the Breakthrough Center. Additionally, the Governor's P-20 Leadership Council of Maryland (which includes representatives from the department, educator associations, educators in K-12 and higher education, other state agencies and legislators) meets quarterly to plan and monitor college- and career-readiness initiatives.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably in 2014, it commissioned external program evaluations of its RTTT projects. While noteworthy, these evaluations did 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 direct feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts through its district support visits, feedback on annual district Bridge to Excellence Master Plans, and Bridge to Excellence Master Plan site visits to randomly selected Title I schools each year.
  - 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.