Professional Learning
Project Overview and Look-Fors

SREB's Benchmarking State Implementation of College- and Career-Readiness Standards project studied state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16 to foster effective professional learning for educators statewide on state college- and career-readiness standards (or standards) in English language arts and math, K-12.

Areas of state work SREB studied: In collaboration with SREB states and professional learning experts, SREB identified four major areas in which state education agencies (SEAs) and other state leaders provide leadership and support local efforts to deliver high-quality, standards-aligned professional learning that meets the needs of all teachers, in service of helping all students master the standards. SREB's analysis of how states have carried out work in each area forms the basis of this study.

- **Area 1 - Establish clear expectations:** Has the state established clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on its standards through state professional learning standards or other policies?

- **Area 2 - Provide guidance, technical assistance and other supports:** Does the SEA provide information, guidance, tools, direct assistance and other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation, to strengthen local professional learning efforts?

- **Area 3 - Offer professional learning**: Does the SEA offer professional learning opportunities that develop educators' understanding of the state standards and educators' skills to implement them — and that build educators' capacity to lead high-quality professional learning locally?

- **Area 4 - Use data and accountability for continuous improvement:** Does the SEA use data to inform its planning and leadership of professional learning, and does it provide feedback to local leaders and support accountability for excellence in local professional learning?

SREB criteria for gauging the levels of implementation of state efforts: SREB, in collaboration with state representatives and professional learning experts, developed a set of criteria — "look-fors" — for state work in each of the four areas. The look-fors represent expected actions states take to drive continual improvement in professional learning at the state and local levels.

SREB researchers categorized state efforts 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

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SREB's methodology:

SREB researchers gathered information on efforts in 15 states during spring and summer 2015.

Alabama	Florida	Louisiana	North Carolina	Tennessee
Arkansas	Georgia	Maryland	Oklahoma	Virginia
Delaware	Kentucky	Mississippi	South Carolina	West Virginia

Researchers reviewed state policy documents, SEA websites and other online sources, and interviewed state education agency (SEA) leaders in 12 of the states. In nine of the states, SREB also interviewed teachers and school and district leaders (35 in total with an average of four per state). These educators provided SREB with valuable perspectives on the ways local practitioners access and use the supports provided by the states, helping SREB researchers understand state efforts at a deeper level. SEA leaders in 14 of the states provided feedback on their state profile as SREB researchers prepared it.

Report series:

1. **State profiles** provide an overview of each state's work, including highlights and actions for states to consider moving forward to foster improvement. This ***Project Overview and Look-Fors*** document accompanies the profiles — providing background information on the project, the research and the basis for SREB findings on the level of state implementation.

2. A ***Cross-State Trends*** report describes trends across the states, highlights successes and challenges and provides recommendations to inform states' continuous improvement planning.

3. A **topical brief**, to be published after the *Cross-State Trends* report and state profiles, will take an in-depth look at a few of the toughest issues states grapple with, examine existing research on the issues, and explore strategies for improvement.

More benchmarking reports on other topics related to state leadership of implementation of standards are forthcoming from SREB. **Access all the reports on the project <u>Web page</u>**.

Look-Fors

In each of the following six tables, the look-fors column lists the look-fors that SREB used to analyze state efforts. The other columns graphically represent SREB's method of assessing the level of state implementation on the look-fors. The X's in the cells indicate the extent to which state efforts address the look-fors in each level of implementation. Notations in parentheses indicate variations in meeting a look-for. See the state profiles for descriptions of state efforts in each area.

Tables:

Area 1: Establish Clear Expectations

Area 2: Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support

- ✓ A: Guidance and tools
- ✓ B: Technical assistance
- ✓ C: Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Area 3: Offer Professional Learning

Area 4: Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

1 Establish Clear Expectations

Look-Fors	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	Essential	Strong
State adopted statewide professional learning standards to establish clear expectations that the state, districts and schools implement professional learning that is - rigorous, - aligned to the state college- and career-readiness standards, - research-based, and - outcomes-oriented for all educators and students.	(may provide guidance)	X	X
State established additional expectations to support implementation of the professional learning standards at the state and local levels, such as a statewide definition of professional learning or requirements for local professional learning systems.			X

2 Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support

A: Guidance and tools

Look-Fors *SEA offers ...*	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	Essential	Strong
General guidance and tools to support local planning and implementation of the state college- and career-readiness standards, including professional learning (for example, general school or district improvement plans).	X	X	X
Resources for delivering, and exemplars of, professional learning on the state college- and career-readiness standards, archived online for on-demand access by educators (for example, materials, tools, videos, courses, exemplars of high-quality professional learning).		X (a variety, or extensive offerings)	X (extensive offerings, including sets of exemplar materials from high-quality, comprehensive professional learning programs)
Specific, in-depth guidance, tools or rubrics to support local planning, implementation and evaluation of professional learning on the state college- and career-readiness standards (for example, professional learning manuals or rubrics).			X

Note: SREB determined whether states have standards or requirements for **induction and mentoring programs** for new educators that address state college- and career-readiness standards. SREB also determined if the SEA offers guidance or tools to support such programs, offers training for participants, and evaluates the quality and outcomes of the programs. This information is summarized in the state profiles. However, as some states do not require such programs, this information is not included in the look-fors and hence SEA efforts do not impact state placement in the levels of implementation.

B: Technical assistance

Look-Fors *SEA, by itself or in collaboration with regional centers or partners, provides …*	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	**Essential**	**Strong**
Review and feedback on improvement or professional learning plans for all districts (or schools) or just for those in need of improvement.	X	X	X
Intensive, direct assistance for schools in need of improvement and their districts.	X	X	X
Some assistance for professional learning offered to all districts (the type and degree of assistance delivered to districts may vary depending on a variety of factors including differences in regional center capacity and local participation).		X	X
Ongoing, role-specific assistance for district leaders (for example, content experts or professional development directors) to build district expertise and capacity to lead professional learning.			X
Structured, ongoing assistance on professional learning and implementation of the standards. Assistance is offered to local leadership teams and reaches a large number of — and in some cases, *all* — districts or schools in the state. This assistance is designed to build the capacity of local district and school leaders and teachers to provide high-quality professional learning for all educators.			X

C: Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Look-Fors *SEA provides or has established...*	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	**Essential**	**Strong**
Technology to increase educator access to professional learning resources (such as a digital archive of on-demand materials) and perhaps to facilitate online collaboration among educators. May also use a learning management system.	X	X	X
Policies that allow schools or districts to seek flexibilities from state laws or policies, that they may use to pursue innovative approaches to increasing and enhancing professional learning (for example, charter schools or innovation zones).		X	X
A high-priority, statewide initiative focused on increasing local flexibility, for the purpose of enhancing professional learning.			X

Note: SREB gathered information on the **funding sources** states have used in 2014-15 and 2015-16 to support professional learning. This information is summarized in the state profiles. However, this information is not included in the look-fors and does not impact state placement in the levels of implementation.

3 | Offer Professional Learning

Look-Fors *The SEA, by itself or in collaboration with regional centers or partners, offers ...*	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	**Essential**	**Strong**
Some opportunities for teachers and school and district leaders to develop their understanding of the standards.	X	X	X
Numerous opportunities for teachers and school and district leaders to develop their understanding of and skills to implement the standards.		X	X
Extensive, long-term, coordinated professional learning for local leadership teams including teachers and school and district leaders, reaching a large number of — and in some cases, *all* — districts or schools in the state. This professional learning is designed to develop local understanding of and skills to implement the state standards *and* to build local capacity to provide high-quality professional learning for all educators.			X

4 | Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

Look-Fors *The SEA has established the following practices ...*	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	**Essential**	**Strong**
Use of Data			
Analyzes various types of data to inform state leadership of professional learning.	X	X	X
Uses clear structures and routines at the agency to regularly analyze data to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of state professional learning efforts.		X	X (clear, centralized and systematic, involves multiple levels of leadership across divisions in the SEA and includes input from partners and educators)
Evaluates state professional learning initiatives, using methods that include rigorous examination of the impacts on teacher or student outcomes, to help state leaders understand the effects of professional learning initiatives, promote effective practices and weed out ineffective ones.			X
Feedback and Accountability			
Provides feedback to local leaders (at least in schools and districts in need of improvement) on their professional learning efforts through multiple channels, such as reviews of improvement plans or onsite monitoring.		X	X
Provides monitoring, support and improvement directives to schools and districts in need of improvement, as part of the interventions they undergo. Otherwise, the responsibility to demand accountability and drive actions to improve local professional learning rests with schools and districts.	X	X	X

Note: Accountability for continuous improvement of local professional learning is currently an exploratory topic for SREB. SREB intends to work with professional learning experts and states to explore this area of state leadership further.