



SREB

# Alignment of Instructional Materials

*Trends in State Efforts*



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English Language Arts and Math  
2014-15 and 2015-16

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## Acknowledgements

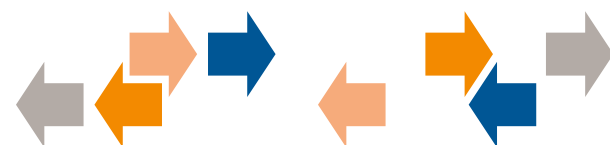
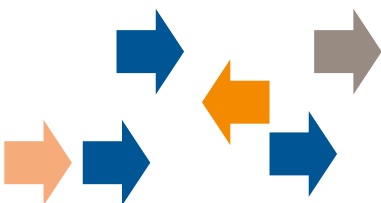
Kimberly Anderson, director, SREB's Benchmarking College- and Career-Readiness Standards, and Mary Elizabeth Mira, assistant director, SREB's Benchmarking College- and Career-Readiness Standards, prepared this report. Colleagues at Education First, EdReports.org and Student Achievement Partners provided valuable feedback during the development of the report.

State education agencies, state boards of education, legislators, organizations that provide services and support to state agencies, and funders can use this report to learn about trends in state efforts, explore highlights from states with strong efforts and identify recommendations for continuous improvement of state education systems.

This report is available at [www.sreb.org/benchmarking](http://www.sreb.org/benchmarking). It is also available on SREB's [Insights](#) platform, along with 15 state profiles, each describing one state's work in detail. These reports update the information in SREB's [reports](#) on aligned teaching resources released in January 2015.

Underlined words in the online edition represent hyperlinks to additional information. In the print version, they alert the reader to additional information available online.

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# Executive Summary

## Why align instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards?

Research shows that high-quality instructional materials that are aligned to state standards can reduce variability in the quality of instruction across classrooms and help boost student achievement. Making better choices about instructional materials is also relatively inexpensive and easy, compared to other state-level efforts to improve teaching and learning, such as reforming teacher preparation, teacher selection and teacher evaluation systems. However, research also shows that teachers often do not have materials that are aligned to their state's college- and career-readiness standards.

Many of the educators SREB interviewed for this study confirmed that gaps exist in the availability of materials aligned to their standards. Interviewees reported that as educators seek to fill those gaps, they need resources and assistance to build their understanding of college- and career-readiness standards and related instructional strategies, and to enhance their skills in designing, selecting and using instructional materials to help all students master the standards.

## SREB benchmarking reports

**SREB studied the degree to which the state education agencies (SEAs) in 15 SREB states provided leadership and support** for the statewide identification and use of high-quality instructional materials that aligned to state K-12 standards in English language arts (ELA) and math. The study focused on state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16 in the following three areas of action.

1. **Establishing clear conventions** — *criteria and processes* — for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials
2. **Supporting local efforts** to identify and use aligned instructional materials by providing educators with *guidance, instructional materials, professional learning and technical assistance*
3. **Using data to continuously improve** state efforts



## Findings and recommendations

### Area 1

#### Establishing clear conventions for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, nine of the 15 states had established **criteria** to review instructional materials for alignment to college- and career-readiness standards, which they had verified fully and accurately reflected the content and rigor of their state standards. Ten states used criteria that were consistent for textbooks and other instructional materials that the SEA offered.

State **processes** for reviewing, developing and selecting aligned materials varied in frequency. At the time of the study, eight states had conducted their most recent state-level textbook review process sufficiently timely to ensure that the textbooks they adopted for use in classrooms in 2014-15 and 2015-16 aligned to then-current standards. In five states, however, the timing of the state textbook adoption cycle in these years did not keep pace with changes in state standards in at least one content area. State-adopted textbooks had met old standards but did not necessarily reflect then-current standards. Yet, educators were required to implement then-current standards. Delays in textbook review lead to potential misalignment in content and rigor between state-adopted textbooks and the instruction implicit in the standards that state leaders expected teachers to deliver in the classroom.

In 11 states, the SEA used clear processes to develop, select and update items at least annually for the online repository of instructional materials it offered educators. This practice ensured that items posted in 2014-15 and 2015-16 had been reviewed for alignment to the standards educators implemented in those years.

Four states — Florida, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina — undertook **strong efforts** in this area.

### Recommendations

Two clear recommendations for state leaders emerged from SREB's analysis of state efforts.

1. Verify that the **criteria** for developing and selecting instructional materials fully and accurately reflect the content and rigor of the state college- and career-readiness standards and that consistent criteria are applied to textbooks and other instructional materials.
2. Use regular and frequent **processes** that involve educators to develop and select instructional materials that align to the standards educators are responsible for implementing, and that address educator needs for tools to deliver rigorous instruction to all students.

#### Why are these recommendations critical?

- While textbook publishers claim that their products align to college- and career-readiness standards, experts and educators have challenged some of these claims. Educators need tools and support to verify textbook alignment for themselves.
- Participants in state and local processes to develop and select instructional materials have different levels of familiarity with state standards, and varying amounts of experience in curriculum development and evaluation. They need tools and support to develop a shared understanding of how instructional materials can consistently reflect the content and rigor of college- and career-readiness standards.
- Teachers often find and create their own instructional materials. They need expertise and tools to select and develop materials that are fully aligned to their state's standards.
- State standards change frequently, and textbook vendors and open educational resources (OER) developers continually make new materials available. Educators need access to current materials, that they know the state has reviewed for quality and alignment to the state standards that educators are responsible for implementing.

## Area 2

### Supporting local efforts to identify and use aligned instructional materials

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, SEAs in the 15 states offered educators **guidance** to help educators learn about state standards, instructional strategies and aligning instructional materials, though the number of pieces of guidance states offered varied widely. The SEAs also offered **instructional materials**, ranging from a few items to a very large number and variety of items, to help educators fill gaps in the local curriculum and deliver classroom instruction.

The **professional learning** and the **technical assistance** SEAs offered varied widely, from extensive to minimal. Five states provided extensive, integrated and sustained opportunities for teams from most, if not all, districts in the state to build knowledge and skills in selecting, designing and using instructional materials aligned to state standards.

Six states undertook **strong efforts** in this area — Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina.

*Guidance included information about the standards and aligned teaching strategies, rubrics for gauging alignment of instructional materials, templates for designing instruction, lists of adopted textbooks and online professional learning resources.*

*Instructional materials included a variety of tools and resources that educators could use to plan and deliver instruction, such as model lesson and unit plans, sample formative assessments, textbooks, student workbooks and manipulatives, recommended texts and videos, and multimedia learning tools.*

## Recommendations

Two clear recommendations for state leaders emerged from SREB’s analysis of state efforts.

1. Offer educators a substantial number and variety of **guidance documents and aligned instructional materials**. Ensure that the SEA’s online resource repository is easy for educators to find and navigate.
2. Provide educators with integrated and sustained **professional learning and technical assistance** to support instructional materials alignment efforts statewide. Expand or create these services to fit local contexts.

### Why are these recommendations critical?

- Educators have access to an increasing stream of OER on the Internet. They need a manageable set of resources and materials that have been expertly selected and developed for their state standards. This will save educators time and effort, and will help ensure that all educators statewide have access to consistently high-quality materials.
- SREB interviewees stressed that many educators felt underprepared to choose wisely from the vast array of OER or to develop their own aligned materials. Educators need regular, sustained opportunities to study the standards and instructional strategies for all students, build skills in materials alignment, and collaborate with others to improve.



## Area 3

### Using data to continuously improve state efforts

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, SEA leaders in nine states reported gathering **multiple types of data on at least an annual basis**. **The data informed at least one key aspect of the agency's efforts** to foster statewide use of high-quality instructional materials aligned to state standards. In all the states, SEA leaders participated in the analysis and use of data, though the ways in which they did this, and how often they did it, varied. In 11 states, SEA leaders met regularly with educators to discuss data, and in seven states SEA leaders consulted with partners, such as regional centers and universities.

Eleven states exhibited **strong efforts** in this area: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. Of these, four collected **data on the impact of state-provided materials and services** on educator knowledge and practice, or student achievement.

#### Recommendation

One clear recommendation for state leaders emerged from SREB's analysis of state efforts.

1. Foster **more use of data and research** by the SEA, educators and partners. Promote access to high-quality information and research on the **standards alignment and effectiveness** of available instructional materials and professional development on aligning materials. Study the alignment and effectiveness of the state's own materials and services.

#### Why is this recommendation critical?

- Relatively little rigorous research has been conducted on the effectiveness of instructional materials or professional development on materials alignment in improving teaching practice and student learning.
- Without rigorous studies of whether resources and training lead to changes in educator practice and student learning, policymakers have little evidence to guide decisions about how to improve.

## Moving forward:

### Support for states to implement the recommendations

Regardless of the many differences among the 15 states, SEA leaders agreed their agencies continue to need the following types of support to provide the resources and services their educators need to implement the standards with fidelity and improve student achievement: **additional staff; more expertise and professional development; opportunities to collaborate with other states, experts, partners and educators; and funding to establish and sustain efforts**.

SEA leaders noted that these types of support would **also enhance other aspects of state work to help students achieve college and career readiness**. States could better integrate the SEA's work on curriculum with other efforts such as professional learning, educator effectiveness, assessment, accountability, high school course pathways and graduation requirements. States could enhance the SEA's communication with educators to increase educator involvement in state initiatives and their use of state resources and support. States could also foster more collaborative learning, problem solving and improvement among educators in classrooms, school buildings, and districts within a state as well as across states.



# I. Introduction

## Why align instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards?

In recent years, states across the nation have adopted K-12 college- and career-readiness standards in ELA and math. As a result, states now have a stronger foundation from which to improve student achievement and boost graduates' readiness for postsecondary education and the workforce. To implement these standards, educators — teachers, school and district leaders, and other personnel who support instruction — need to learn more about the standards and instructional strategies for teaching them. Read about state efforts to provide professional learning to educators in SREB's [2016 reports](#).

**Educators also need high-quality instructional materials that are aligned to state standards, to help them provide students with consistently rigorous, coherent instruction.** As Brookings Institution scholars Chingos and Whitehurst noted in a 2012 report, students learn both through interactions with people, and through learning experiences mediated by instructional materials, such as textbooks, workbooks, tests and instructional software. High-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials can help to reduce variability in the content and quality of instruction students experience, even when accounting for the differences in how individual teachers may use them.

**Studies have shown the impact of using high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials on student achievement.** A 2017 Brookings Institution study of textbooks in California and a 2016 Harvard University study of textbook use and instruction in five states (including two SREB states) found significantly higher student achievement in classrooms using certain textbooks versus others. A 2017 meta-analysis of research on the effect of curriculum materials, conducted by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and Center for Research and Reform in Education, found that curricular materials have a critical impact on students' academic success, and that the cumulative effect of exposure to high-quality materials across a student's academic career can be significant.

Chingos and Whitehurst also noted that **making better choices about instructional materials is relatively inexpensive and easy**, compared to other state-level efforts to improve teaching and learning, such as reforming teacher preparation, teacher selection and teacher evaluation systems.

However, as researchers at the Fordham Institute (2016), RAND (2016), the Center on Education Policy (2014), and the Education Week Research Center (2016) have noted, **teachers often do not have instructional materials that are aligned to their state's college- and career-readiness standards.**

Many of the educators SREB interviewed for this study confirmed that gaps exist in the availability of materials aligned to their standards. Interviewees reported that as educators seek to fill those gaps, they need resources and assistance to build their understanding of college- and career-readiness standards and related instructional strategies, and to enhance their skills in designing, selecting and using instructional materials to help all students master the standards.



## SREB benchmarking reports: Purpose and structure

As part of its initiative to [benchmark readiness standards](#), SREB staff worked with representatives from SREB states and national experts to identify the following **three areas of action through which SEAs can provide leadership and support for the statewide use of high-quality instructional materials that align to state K-12 standards** in ELA and math.

1. **Establishing clear conventions** — *criteria and processes* — for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials
2. **Supporting local efforts** to identify and use aligned instructional materials by providing
  - a. *guidance* for building educators' knowledge about the standards, instructional strategies, and developing and selecting instructional tools;
  - b. *instructional materials* that educators can access on-demand to fill gaps in local materials and provide instruction in the classroom; and
  - c. *professional learning and technical assistance* to build local knowledge and skills, and support educator use of aligned materials.
3. **Using data to continuously improve** state efforts



SREB developed a list of actions that demonstrate state leadership and support in each area. These actions, or “[look-fors](#),” guided data collection and the analysis of state efforts. **All participating states provided districts, schools and educators with leadership and support in each area. State efforts fell into one of three levels of implementation:**

### Minimal

Indicates that state leadership addressed some, but not all of the look-fors that SREB considered key for leading and supporting local efforts.

### Essential

Indicates that state leadership addressed the key look-fors.

### Strong

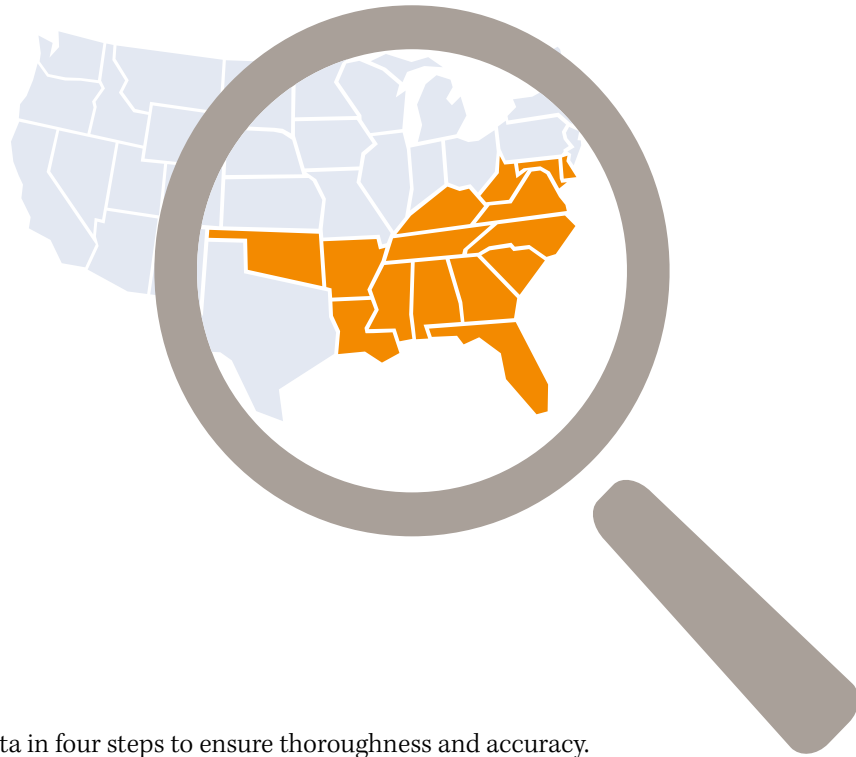
Indicates that, in addition to addressing the key look-fors, state leadership offered further, substantive support to districts, schools and educators to foster quality and consistency statewide.

In some cases, SREB researchers also designated a state action as **notable**, to spotlight individual efforts that were innovative or exemplary, regardless of the state’s overall level of implementation.

## Participating states

**SREB studied efforts in 15 states in 2014-15 and 2015-16. The following states participated in the study.**

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



## Methodology

SREB researchers collected and organized data in four steps to ensure thoroughness and accuracy.

1. Extensive reviews of online sources, such as SEA websites, state plans and reports for all 15 states.
2. Interviews with SEA leaders in 12 states to discuss successes and challenges they encountered in the three action areas, and expand on data from online sources. SREB invited SEA leaders in all states in the study to participate in interviews.
3. Interviews with educators in six states – a total of 28 with an average of five per state — to discuss their experiences with the resources and services their SEA provided, and their successes and challenges in acquiring and using instructional materials aligned to their state's standards.
4. Feedback from each SEA on a draft of their state profile prepared by SREB, to ensure factual accuracy.





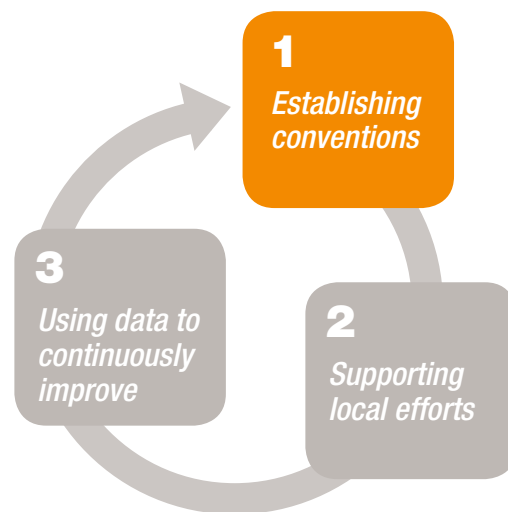
## II. Findings and Recommendations

### Area 1

#### Establishing clear conventions for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials

SEAs can provide the foundation for state- and local-level efforts to align instructional materials such as textbooks, lesson and unit plans, formative assessments, student workbooks and multimedia learning tools to state college- and career-readiness standards. They can do this by establishing clear, shared conventions to guide the review, selection and development of materials. **Conventions include**

- **Criteria**, such as the specifications in a rubric, that provide guidance to assess the extent to which textbooks and other materials reflect the content and rigor of state college- and career-readiness standards.
- **Processes that involve educators** to regularly develop, review and select high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials.



#### Highlights from states doing strong work in this area

Four states demonstrated strong efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16 to establish conventions for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials. Two of these states' efforts are described below.

##### Louisiana

- **Consistent, externally verified criteria:** The Louisiana Department of Education established consistent criteria to review textbooks and benchmark assessments, and to develop, review and select materials offered to educators online. To ensure that the criteria accurately reflected the content and rigor of the Louisiana State Standards, the department developed rubrics based on Student Achievement Partners' [Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool \(IMET\)](#) and [Assessment Evaluation Tool \(AET\)](#), and Achieve's [OER](#) and [Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products \(EQuIP\)](#) rubrics. These tools are nationally recognized as clear and accurate for assessing alignment to college- and career-readiness standards.

- **Frequent review of textbooks:** According to state board of education policy, Louisiana did not adopt textbooks at the state level. However, the department developed the [Curricular Resources Annotated Review](#) process to provide local leaders with free and reliable information to support their efforts to select effective materials to meet local needs. The process assessed the alignment of textbooks and benchmark assessments to the Louisiana State Standards. The process involved public comment, pre-screening of materials by the department, review and ranking by department specialists and teachers trained through the department's Teacher Leader initiative, followed by further public comment and final ranking by the department. The department reviewed materials on a rolling basis. ELA and math textbooks were last reviewed in 2015. In 2016, the department began the next review process. Such frequent reviews have enabled Louisiana to provide up-to-date information for local leaders. The department reported that in 2016, more than 70 percent of districts had selected materials identified through the review process as high quality and aligned.
- **Frequent review of online, on-demand instructional materials:** The department's process to develop and review items for its [Teacher Support Toolbox](#) included monthly item development by trained Louisiana teacher leaders and periodic item reviews by department specialists.

In 2016, [RAND](#) reported findings from its 2015 national survey of educators. Teachers in Louisiana showed **notably higher levels of knowledge** about their state standards than did their peers nationwide. Louisiana teachers also reported **using materials and teaching strategies** that are aligned to college- and career-readiness standards at a higher rate than did their peers in other states. The researchers noted that these higher levels of understanding and practice were likely the result of the department's efforts to provide educators with continually updated and coordinated sets of information and tools to support the local alignment of instructional materials.

### North Carolina

- **Consistent, externally verified criteria:** The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction established consistent criteria to review and select textbooks and other instructional materials the department offered educators online. To ensure that the criteria accurately reflected the content and rigor of the Common Core State Standards for ELA and math, the department used two strategies. First, it based the criteria for selecting math textbooks and for math and ELA items in its [Home Base](#) repository on tools nationally recognized as clear and accurate for assessing alignment to college- and career-readiness standards. These tools were Student Achievement Partners' [IMET](#), and Achieve's [OER](#) and [EQuIP](#) rubrics. Second, it submitted its criteria for ELA textbooks to external experts for review.
- **Review of textbooks based on the standards:** The state's process for reviewing and adopting textbooks included a commission of educators and parents. The commission could appoint regional advisers and content area experts for additional expertise, for whom the department provided training and support. ELA textbooks were last adopted in 2011, followed by math in 2014. Because North Carolina implemented the Common Core State Standards for ELA and math beginning in 2010-11, the state adoptions in 2011 and 2014 provided local boards of education with a state-recommended list of textbooks that aligned to the standards that teachers implemented in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Local boards were not required to select textbooks from the state list, however.
- **Frequent review of online, on-demand materials:** The department's process for reviewing and selecting items for its [Home Base](#) repository included department content analysts and partners from North Carolina State University. Vendors and North Carolina educators developed and submitted items, and reviewers evaluated them at least semi-annually.



## Recommendations based on state trends in this area

Based on the trends in state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16, state education leaders should consider the following two recommendations, and intensify their efforts where needed to foster the statewide alignment of instructional materials to state standards.

**1 of 5** Verify that the criteria for developing and selecting instructional materials fully and accurately reflect the content and rigor of state college- and career-readiness standards, and that consistent criteria are applied to textbooks and other instructional materials.

Consistent, high-quality criteria can help educators develop high-quality instructional materials and select wisely from available instructional products. State leaders should consider the following actions.

- Use rubrics and review tools from trusted, independent third parties, that are nationally recognized as clear and accurate for assessing the alignment of instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards, such as the [IMET](#) from Student Achievement Partners, and the [EQuIP](#) and [OER](#) rubrics from Achieve. States could use the rubrics and tools in their entirety, or as a foundation for developing the state's own criteria.
- Submit the state's internally-developed criteria to external experts for review. Experts could include trusted, independent third parties such as those mentioned above, higher education faculty members with expertise in instructional materials development and deep knowledge of the state's standards, and others.

**2 of 5** Use regular and frequent processes involving educators to develop and select instructional materials that align to the standards educators are responsible for implementing and address educator needs for tools to deliver rigorous instruction to all students.

State leaders should consider the following actions.

- Assess and adjust when needed, the timing of state processes to develop, review, adopt and update instructional materials.
  - Implement a more frequent state textbook adoption schedule than the typical five- to seven-year cycles. Changing the frequency of state textbook adoptions may require collaboration between the state legislature, SEA and state board of education.
  - Adjust the timing of the state textbook adoption cycle if needed when state standards are revised or replaced, to ensure that adopted materials align to the new standards.
  - Develop, select, review and update items in the SEA online instructional resource repository at least annually. Frequent updates could require greater staff time at the SEA, and more frequent collaboration with educators.
- Save time and effort at the state and local levels by leveraging work already done by expert third-party organizations and strong states. For example, [EdReports.org](#) provides free reviews of materials alignment to college- and career-readiness standards conducted by trained educators, and Louisiana's [Curricular Resources Annotated Review](#) is an example of a rigorous state review process.
- Provide districts and schools with sufficient funds, and flexibility in the use of funds, to enable them to purchase textbooks and train teachers on selecting and developing classroom materials, especially in preparation for the first year of implementation of newly adopted standards.

## ? Why are these recommendations critical?

**By addressing the recommendations above, state leaders can strengthen their efforts and address the following four challenges that face states and educators in the alignment of instructional materials to state standards.**

**Textbook publishers claim that their products align to college- and career-readiness standards, but experts and educators have challenged some of these claims. Educators need tools and support to verify textbook alignment for themselves.** Textbook publishers consistently claim their products are aligned to state standards, although experts and educators have disputed many such claims. In a national survey of educators in 2016, researchers at the Fordham Institute found that 42 percent of teachers said the math textbooks available to them were not well aligned to their state's standards. [EdReports.org](http://EdReports.org), a non-profit organization that works with experts and trained educators across the country to review vendor materials and provide free, public ratings of their alignment to college- and career-readiness standards, has reported that far fewer materials than those that claim alignment meet the organization's alignment criteria.

Several educators SREB interviewed for this study reported that when their state adopted its new standards, their district quickly purchased textbooks that vendors claimed were aligned. However, teachers soon found their new textbooks were no better aligned to the new standards than were their old ones. They said that, as a result, many teachers did not use the new textbooks. Educators and state textbook adoption committee members must be armed with clear, rigorous alignment criteria and other objective sources of information about textbook alignment, such as external expert reviews, so that they can astutely assess textbook publishers' claims and make wise purchases.

*“We bought a book several years ago, when it first came out. We were desperate, we had nothing to help us teach the new standards. But it was the biggest waste of money because it really wasn't aligned at all. And now we can't afford to buy anything else because we already spent the money.”*

— Teacher

**Participants in state and local processes for developing and selecting instructional materials have different levels of familiarity with state standards, and varying amounts of experience in curriculum development and evaluation. They need tools and support to develop shared understanding of instructional materials and identify items that are consistent in content and rigor.** The state-level teams that oversaw the development, review and selection of instructional materials in the 15 states in this study included a range of constituents: SEA standards and curriculum experts, teachers, representatives from external partner organizations, higher education faculty, parents and vendors. These individuals typically bring a wide range of familiarity with standards and varying levels of expertise in instructional materials.

Additionally, authority for curriculum decision making is slowly shifting to the local level, where expertise and capacity to select instructional materials varies widely. In the 15 states in this study, districts had autonomy to independently select instructional materials. Some states did not adopt textbooks, some states did not require districts to select from the state adoption list and in some states, districts could seek a modification to their state's requirement that they select from the state adoption list. In 2016, three of the 15 states had legislation or policy changes within the previous three years that decentralized textbook selection authority. This trend to decentralize curriculum decision making in the SREB region reflects a national trend. Education Week reported in 2015 that state control over curriculum materials is slowly shifting to districts, as more and more

states modify or discard long-standing state adoption processes. Districts, in turn, often leave decisions about instructional materials to the school level.

In light of these factors, a rubric or checklist that has been verified by the state to accurately reflect the content and rigor of the state standards can help diverse users develop a shared understanding of high-quality instructional materials and consistently select appropriate content.

**Teachers often find and create their own instructional materials. They need expertise and tools to select and develop materials that are fully aligned to their state’s standards.** Most of the educators SREB interviewed reported that teachers felt underprepared to develop materials and choose from the vast array of OER on the Internet to create a coherent, yearlong sequence of instruction on their standards. A few teachers added that their school or district had no formal process or tool to help them ensure that what they developed or selected aligned to state standards. Educators stressed that they needed more information and tools, training, support and funding to design and access items they felt confident were fully aligned. In most of the states in the study, the SEA did recommend an alignment rubric; however, many educators were either not aware that the state had recommended a rubric or were not sure how to use it. Communication and training on how to apply state-recommended rubrics can increase the use of the tools to support the alignment of instructional materials statewide.

*“Our biggest challenge is the difficulty of identifying and purchasing high-quality resources. We’ve revised standards before in our state, every five to seven years. That’s nothing new. And being asked to teach more rigorous standards, that is just a part of the continuous improvement process. But this is the first time where we are asked to do that in absence of curriculum. We’re asking teachers to change their instructional strategies and hone their craft, but they’re being asked to make bricks without straw.”*

— District Leader

**State standards change frequently, and new materials continually become available from vendors and OER developers. Educators need access to materials that are current and have been reviewed for alignment to the standards educators are responsible for implementing.** Historically, states have adopted new standards for ELA and math on a five- to seven-year cycle. However, since 2010, many states in the SREB region have adopted or revised standards more frequently — and, according to plans states reported to SREB researchers, this trend will continue in the next few years.

Between 2014-15 and 2015-16 alone, 12 of the 15 states in the study made changes to their standards. Four states — Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina — implemented new or revised standards. Eight others — Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia — scheduled the implementation of new or revised standards in the following two years. Two states, Mississippi and Tennessee, took both actions, implementing revisions to their standards between 2014-15 and 2015-16, and scheduling additional changes in the following two years.

Additionally, vendors and curriculum developers continually release new and updated textbooks and OER. The infrequency of textbook adoption in most states means multiple years can go by before states can consider new materials that may better align to their standards. This delay can limit educators’ access to appropriate materials.

All educators can benefit from textbooks and other instructional materials that have been verified to align to the standards that educators must help students master, especially educators in smaller and poorer districts, who often do not have funds or expertise to review and develop their own materials.

## State trends in this area

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, nine of the 15 states had established **criteria** to review instructional materials for alignment to college- and career-readiness standards, which they had verified fully and accurately reflected the content and rigor of their state standards. Ten states used criteria that were consistent for textbooks and other instructional materials that the SEA offered.

State **processes** for reviewing, developing, selecting and updating aligned instructional materials varied in frequency. Eight states had conducted their most recent state-level textbook review process in a sufficiently timely manner to ensure that reviewers examined the textbooks for alignment to the standards that educators implemented in classrooms in 2014-15 and 2015-16, in at least one content area. In 11 states, the SEA developed, selected and updated items for its online repository of instructional materials at least annually. This cycle of review ensured that items posted in 2014-15 and 2015-16 had been reviewed for alignment to the standards educators implemented in those years.

State leaders can use the descriptions below of state efforts to help them determine which of these actions their state has accomplished, and which still need to be addressed for the standards currently being implemented. State leaders can also use these descriptions to identify actions that will be necessary the next time state standards change.

### Criteria to review, develop and select instructional materials

#### Criteria for textbooks

In nine states — Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina and Tennessee — the SEA used or recommended criteria for reviewing textbooks which the SEA had verified accurately reflected the content and rigor of the standards that educators implemented in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

In these nine states, the SEA verified the criteria in one of the following ways.

1. Using rubrics from trusted, independent third parties that were nationally recognized as clear and accurate for assessing the alignment of materials to college- and career-readiness standards – either by using the rubrics in their entirety or by using the content of the rubrics as a foundation for the state’s own criteria; or
2. Submitting the state’s internally-developed criteria to external experts for review.

The SEA in five of the nine states — Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee — provided the state textbook review committee with a rubric or checklist outlining the criteria, to inform the state-level adoption process. In four of the states — Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana and Maryland — though textbooks were not adopted at the state level, the SEA shared a rubric or checklist with districts to guide local selection. Louisiana provided local leaders with additional information through its Curricular Resources Annotated Review process.

The nationally recognized rubrics and tools most commonly used or shared across the nine states were Student Achievement Partners’ [IMET](#) and the [Publishers’ Criteria for the Common Core State Standards](#), developed by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve, Council of the Great City Schools and the National Association of State Boards of Education.



In six states, the SEA had either not established criteria to assess textbook alignment or it had not shared evidence with SREB that it had taken steps to verify that its criteria fully and accurately reflected the content and rigor of the state standards. See Table 1 for more information.

### Criteria for the online, on-demand instructional materials the SEA offered

In 10 states — Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi and North Carolina — the SEA established criteria to assess the alignment of instructional materials, such as lesson plans, unit plans, sample texts, and formative assessment items, for posting in the state’s online resource repository. In these states, the SEA had also taken steps to verify that the criteria accurately reflected the content and rigor of the standards that educators implemented in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

SEAs in these 10 states verified the alignment of their criteria to state standards in one of the same two ways as noted above for textbooks. The most commonly used nationally recognized rubrics were Achieve’s [EQuIP](#) and [OER](#) rubrics.

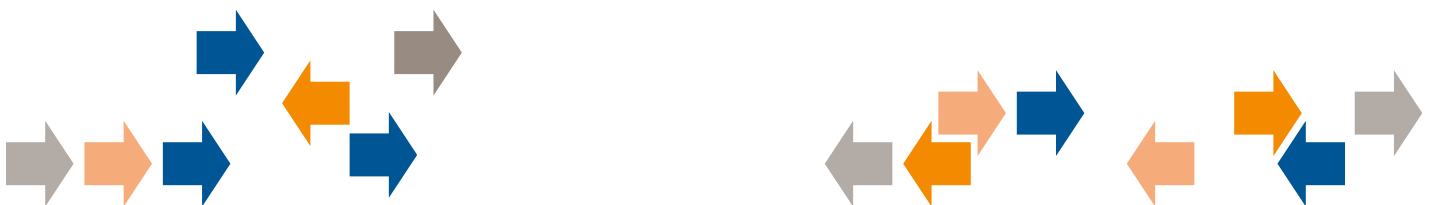
In two states, the SEA reported that it developed its own criteria, but did not share evidence with SREB that it had taken steps such as those listed above to verify that the criteria fully and accurately reflected the content and rigor of the state college- and career-readiness standards. In three other states, the SEA reported that it did not use any criteria beyond the state standards to inform the development, review and selection of items for the SEA’s online resource repository.

### Consistency of criteria for textbooks and other materials

In nine states — Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina and West Virginia — the SEA used consistent criteria to review textbooks and items for the agency’s online resource repository.

In six states, the SEA did not apply consistent criteria for the review of textbooks and items in the SEA’s online resources repository. In these states, the SEA either

- used criteria that had been externally verified to accurately reflect the content and rigor of the state standards for one type of instructional material, but not for the other;
- did not use criteria that was externally verified for either type of material; or
- did not use any criteria beyond the standards to guide the development, review or selection of one or both types of material.



**Table 1:***Criteria States Used or Recommended to Select Textbooks and Online Instructional Materials*

State	STATE CRITERIA		CONSISTENCY OF CRITERIA State used consistent criteria for both textbooks and online materials
	Textbooks	Online instructional materials	
Alabama	✓	✓+	
Arkansas	✓+	✓+	Yes
Delaware	✓+	✓+	Yes
Florida	✓+	✓+	Yes
Georgia	✓+	✓+	Yes
Kentucky	✓+	✓+	Yes
Louisiana	✓+	✓+	Yes
Maryland	✓+	✓+	Yes
Mississippi		✓+	
North Carolina	✓+	✓+	Yes
Oklahoma			
South Carolina	✓	✓	
Tennessee	✓+		
Virginia	✓		
West Virginia	✓	✓	Yes

Notes:

✓ means state established criteria

✓+ means state established criteria *and took steps to verify* that criteria fully and accurately reflected the rigor and content of state standards

## Processes to review, develop and select instructional materials

### Textbook review and adoption: Responsibilities and participation

State law in all 15 states established requirements for a textbook adoption and selection processes.

In 11 states, a state-level process to adopt textbooks was required: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. In these states, a committee was responsible for reviewing textbooks as part of the adoption process. In these states,

- responsibility for appointing members to the state review committee rested with the SEA, state board of education or governor. In Florida, districts also appointed members.
- the required makeup of the state review committee varied. Teachers and school and district leaders were required to participate in all these states. Public constituents, such as parents, were required in six states.

- the SEA was responsible for overseeing and supporting the review process. In 10 of the states, the SEA provided the state review committee with more information than just the state’s college- and career-readiness standards including, for example, an alignment rubric to guide the committee’s review. In five of these states — Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee — the SEA also provided training to the reviewers.
- responsibility varied for adoption of textbooks based on recommendations from the state review committee. In eight of the states, the state board of education was responsible for adoption; in three of the states — Florida, Kentucky and Oklahoma — the committee itself or the SEA was responsible for adoption.

In four states — Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana and Maryland — state law did not allow state-level textbook adoption. In the absence of a state-level adoption process, the SEAs in these states recommended criteria to local leaders that the SEA had verified accurately reflected the content and rigor of the state standards, as noted above. Local leaders could use the criteria to inform local selection. Notably, in Louisiana, the SEA conducted a [Curricular Resources Annotated Review](#) process to provide local leaders with free and reliable information to support their selection of materials. See the description of this process in the Louisiana highlight on p. 9 of this report.

**Table 2:**  
*State Textbook Review Committees: Appointment and Composition*

State	Authority to appoint members to the state textbook review committee				Required composition of the state textbook review committee				
	SEA	State board of education	Governor	Local school districts	Educators	Parents and the public	Content area experts	Higher education faculty	SEA staff
Alabama		X	X		X		X	X	
Florida	X			X	X		X		
Georgia		X			X	X			
Kentucky		X			X	X		X	
Mississippi	X		X		X		X		
North Carolina			X		X	X	X		
Oklahoma			X		X	X			
South Carolina		X			X	X			
Tennessee			X		X				
Virginia	X				X				
West Virginia		X			X				X

Note: Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana and Maryland did not adopt recommended textbooks at the state level during the period studied.

## Textbook review and adoption: Timelines

In the 12 states that adopted or reviewed textbooks at the state level, state policies generally called for adoption every five to seven years. Louisiana stood out for the frequency of its reviews. Through its [Curricular Resources Annotated Review](#) process, the SEA reviewed textbooks on a rolling basis, in response to vendor submission and the availability of funding. This ongoing cycle reduced the lag time between textbook publication and state review. It enabled Louisiana educators always to have access to up-to-date information on materials to meet their needs.

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, eight states had conducted their most recent state-level textbook review processes in a sufficiently timely manner to ensure that reviewers examined the textbooks for alignment to the standards that educators implemented in classrooms in 2014-15 and 2015-16, in at least one content area. Three of these states — Oklahoma, South Carolina and Tennessee — had changed their usual adoption timeline to accommodate the adoption of new or revised standards in at least one content area.

In five states, the timing of the state textbook adoption cycle did not keep up with the pace of changes in state standards. Reviewers in these state's most recent textbook adoption processes evaluated textbooks against standards that differed from the standards educators implemented in the classroom in 2014-15 and 2015-16, in at least one content area. This led to potential points of misalignment between the content and rigor reflected in the state-adopted textbooks, and the content and rigor of the instruction that state leaders expected teachers to deliver in the classroom. See Table 3 below.

Sometimes textbook adoption is delayed not because of cycles of standards adoption, but because of funding. Two states delayed textbook adoption during the timeframe of this study due to budget constraints.

**Table 3:**

*Comparison of Timelines for State Textbook Reviews and College- and Career-Readiness Standards Implementation*

State	Year implementation began for the state standards in place in 2014-15 and 2015-16	Textbook Review Cycle	
		✓ State based its textbook review on standards educators implemented in 2014-15 or 2015-16	
		Math	ELA
Alabama	2014-15		
Florida	2014-15		
Georgia	2015-16		
Kentucky	2010-11		
Louisiana	2012-13	✓	✓
Mississippi	2014-15		✓
North Carolina	2010-11	✓	✓
Oklahoma	2014-15	✓	✓
South Carolina	2015-16	✓	✓
Tennessee	2015-16	✓	✓
Virginia	2009-10	✓	✓
West Virginia	2014-15	✓	✓

Note: Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana and Maryland did not adopt textbooks at the state level. The Louisiana state review process referred to above is the SEA's Curricular Resources Annotated Review process. See a description of the process in the state highlights section on p. 9 of this report.

## Textbook review and adoption: Authority for local selection

In the 15 states in this study, schools and districts had varying degrees of authority over the textbooks they selected.

- In six states — Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia — the state adopted textbooks and districts and schools were required to select from the adoption list. However, districts or schools could request modifications or exceptions to the requirement. In some of these states, districts or schools could request that the state review additional items not on the original state list. In other states, districts that did not want to select from the state’s list had to demonstrate that their local selection process was similar to the state’s process, or that the items they selected aligned to the state standards.
- In five states — Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Virginia — the state adopted textbooks but districts and schools were not required to select from the adoption list.
- In four states — Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana and Maryland — the state did not adopt textbooks. Districts and schools selected textbooks entirely on their own.

**Table 4:**  
*State Role in Local Selection of Textbooks, According to State Law*

State role, according to state law			
	<b>State adoption and local selection requirement</b> State adopted textbooks, and local leaders <i>were required</i> to select from the state adoption list. <i>However</i> , local leaders could select textbooks not on the state list, through various types of exemptions to the requirement.	<b>State adoption but no local selection requirement</b> State adopted textbooks, but local leaders <i>were not required</i> to select textbooks from the adoption list.	<b>No state adoption</b> State did not adopt textbooks. Local leaders reviewed and selected textbooks <i>independently</i> .
State	Alabama		
	Florida	Georgia	
	Kentucky	Mississippi	Arkansas
	South Carolina	North Carolina	Delaware
	Tennessee	Oklahoma	Louisiana
	West Virginia	Virginia	Maryland

Arkansas, Florida and Louisiana reported legislation or policy changes between 2012 and 2015 to decentralize textbook selection authority. Two states removed the state board of education’s authority to adopt textbooks, making textbook adoption entirely a local decision: Arkansas’s Act 511 of 2013, and Louisiana’s revised state board policy of 2012. In Florida, Senate Bill 1388 of 2013 gave districts flexibility to implement their own instructional materials review program. Districts that did so were not required to use 50 percent of their instructional materials funds on materials the state had adopted. Rather, they had to certify to the state that the textbooks they adopted for core courses aligned with all applicable state standards.

### State repositories of online, on-demand instructional materials: Participation in state processes to develop, review and select items

In all 15 states, SEA staff was responsible for leading or facilitating processes to develop, review and select items for the SEA's online repository (or repositories). SEA repositories offered educators instructional materials they could access as needed, online and on-demand, to fill gaps in local curriculum and deliver instruction.

In all 15 states, the SEA collaborated with educators in these processes. Some SEAs strategically engaged teachers participating in state professional learning initiatives, leveraging their time and expertise to enrich the offerings in the repository. For example, Louisiana involved teachers trained through its Teacher Leaders initiative; Delaware involved district staff participating in its Math and Literacy Cadres and teachers trained as members of its Dream Team; and Kentucky involved educators participating in its Leadership Networks.

States also engaged external colleagues. In six states, the SEA collaborated with higher education faculty or representatives from university research centers. In five states, the SEA worked with state or national experts or non-profit organizations, such as public television stations and LearnZillion. In nine states, the SEA involved curriculum vendors, either by including a vendor in the review process or by accepting items submitted by vendors for review. See Table 5 below for a summary of participation in the processes.

**Table 5:**

*Participation in State Processes to Develop, Review, Select and Update Items for State Online Repositories of Instructional Materials*

State	Educators	University faculty or research centers	State and national education experts	Vendors
Alabama	X	X		X
Arkansas	X		X	
Delaware	X		X	
Florida	X	X		X
Georgia	X			
Kentucky	X			X
Louisiana	X		X	X
Maryland	X		X	X
Mississippi	X	X	X	X
North Carolina	X	X		X
Oklahoma	X			
South Carolina	X			
Tennessee	X	X		X
Virginia	X			X
West Virginia	X	X		

## State repositories of online, on-demand instructional materials: Frequency of state processes to develop, review and select items

The biggest variant among state processes to develop, review, select and update items for the SEA resource repository was how often they occurred.

- In five states, the SEA conducted processes more than annually. Louisiana did so monthly; Alabama and Maryland did so at least quarterly; North Carolina did so at least semi-annually; and Florida did so on an ongoing basis, as items were submitted for review.
- In six states — Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee — the SEA conducted these processes annually.
- In Virginia and West Virginia, the SEA conducted these processes less than annually.
- In Kentucky and Oklahoma, the SEA conducted processes on a more variable schedule, such as when funding became available and when state standards changed.

In states that updated items in the repositories at least annually, the SEA helped to ensure that educators always had access to current, standards-aligned items that met their needs. See Table 6 for information on the timing of each state's processes.

**Table 6:**

*Frequency of SEA Processes to Develop, Review, Select and Update Items for State Repositories of Online Instructional Materials*

State	More than annually	Annually	Less than annually	Varied
Alabama	X			
Arkansas		X		
Delaware		X		
Florida	X			
Georgia		X		
Kentucky				X
Louisiana	X			
Maryland	X			
Mississippi		X		
North Carolina	X			
Oklahoma				X
South Carolina		X		
Tennessee		X		
Virginia			X	
West Virginia			X	

Note: Some states had more than one repository. This table accounts for the frequency only for each SEA's primary repository.



## Area 2

### Supporting local efforts to identify and use aligned instructional materials

SEAs can more effectively foster the statewide alignment of curriculum to state college- and career-readiness standards if they provide support for districts, schools and educators to develop, select and use high-quality, aligned instructional materials. **Examples of the support that SEAs can provide include the following.**

- **Guidance** for building educators' knowledge about the standards, instructional strategies, and developing and selecting instructional tools. Guidance can include information about the standards and strategies for teaching them, rubrics for assessing the alignment of instructional materials, templates for designing aligned lessons and units, instructional frameworks, lists of adopted or reviewed textbooks, and professional learning resources.
- **Instructional materials** that educators can access online and on-demand, to fill gaps in local curriculum and provide instruction in the classroom. Instructional materials can include a variety of tools and resources that educators can use to plan and deliver instruction, such as model lesson and unit plans, sample formative assessments, textbooks, student workbooks and manipulatives, recommended texts and videos, and multimedia learning tools.
- **Professional learning and technical assistance** to build local knowledge and skills, and support educator use of aligned materials. SEAs might provide these services themselves or in collaboration with regional centers or other partners.



#### Highlights from states doing strong work in this area

**Six states — Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina — undertook strong efforts in this area** in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Two of these states' efforts are described below.

##### Alabama

- **Extensive guidance:** The Alabama State Department of Education offered extensive online guidance to help educators build their knowledge about the standards and instruction and strengthen their skills in instructional materials alignment. Items included the [Guide for Professional Development/Transition Planning for Implementation of the College- and Career-Ready Standards](#) and extensive guidance for differentiating instruction for diverse learners.
- **Comprehensive, user-friendly instructional materials:** The department's [Alabama Learning Exchange](#) (ALEX) offered an extensive, user-friendly online bank of instructional materials for educators to access on demand to help them fill gaps in local curriculum and provide instruction in the classroom. Offerings included large collections of model lesson and unit plans, and the [Insight Tool](#). The Insight tool enabled users to map out a full year of coordinated instruction and assessment. Then based on the map, users could



select aligned units and lessons from ALEX. The department also provided an online Scantron system for schools and districts to select aligned formative assessments.

- **Coordinated, sustained support services:** The department offered multiple types of integrated professional learning and technical assistance to support local instructional materials alignment efforts. They included quarterly professional learning meetings, ongoing since 2011, for leadership teams from all 136 districts. Regional support staff, including representatives from the Alabama Reading Initiative, the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative and Regional In-Service Centers, provided regular technical assistance to districts to support implementation of their new knowledge and skills. The department also provided quarterly technical assistance to curriculum and instruction directors from all districts. Teachers at schools in need of improvement received training on Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) practices and tools, and content area educators could attend summer teaching academies on evaluating the alignment of instructional materials and assessments.

## Louisiana

- **Extensive guidance:** The Louisiana Department of Education provided extensive guidance to help educators build their knowledge about standards and instruction, and strengthen their skills in curriculum alignment. Items included a [District Planning Guide](#), [Principals' Teaching & Learning Guidebook](#), and numerous [archived curriculum alignment training materials](#) from the department's annual teacher leader summits and quarterly collaboration events.
- **Comprehensive, user-friendly instructional materials:** The [Teacher Support Toolbox](#) offered an extensive set of individual items that educators could access online and on demand to fill gaps in local curriculum and provide instruction in the classroom. Additionally, for math, the department offered grade-specific, yearlong scope and sequence documents to guide the selection of items from the toolbox, and remediation guides to support differentiated instruction for struggling students. For ELA, the department offered [guidebooks](#), developed by Louisiana educators, that laid out fully developed, yearlong grade-specific curricula, including instructional units, lesson plans, texts and classroom assessments. SREB researchers found the toolbox to be well-organized and user-friendly. Additionally, the department's companion [EAGLE 2.0](#) platform offered formative assessment items, including adaptable items for English learners and struggling students and rubrics aligned to the guidebooks.
- **Coordinated, ongoing support services:** The department coordinated its online resources with services to support aligned instruction. The department offered multiple types of professional learning and technical assistance to support local instructional materials alignment efforts. [Teacher leaders](#) from all 1,407 schools in the state had access to regular training, collaboration opportunities and implementation assistance. Teacher leaders and school and district leaders from 40 districts participated in LDC and MDC training and support. The department worked with curriculum vendors to offer districts professional development packages for teachers on the most popular materials from the department's Curricular Resources Annotated Review. (Read about the review process in Area 1 above.) Further, the department provided [District Support Networks](#) for all districts in the state, and quarterly supervisor collaboration events to assist school and district leaders in building the capacity of teacher leaders to align curriculum. The department also offered a principal fellowship program to help principals strengthen their skills in leading materials alignment.
- In 2016, [RAND](#) reported that its 2015 national survey of educators showed the impact of the Louisiana Department of Education's efforts to provide extensive instructional materials, comprehensive support for teacher leaders, and (with the support of vendors) professional development packages aligned with state standards for district personnel. These efforts likely contributed to the notable advances that Louisiana educators made in knowledge and practice compared with their peers nationwide.



## Recommendations based on state trends in this area

Based on the trends in state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16, state education leaders should consider the following two recommendations, and intensify their efforts where needed to support teachers, schools and districts as they align instructional materials to state standards and use aligned materials in the classroom.

**3 of 5** Offer educators a substantial number and variety of guidance documents and aligned instructional materials. Ensure that the SEA's online resource repository is easy for educators to find and navigate.

A robust yet manageable repository of guidance and instructional resources can help educators make efficient use of state support to align their materials and develop coherent programs of instruction for all students. State leaders should consider the following actions.

- Offer guidance explaining the standards and how to teach them, templates for designing aligned lessons and units, and rubrics or other tools for assessing the alignment of plans and materials. Include yearlong curriculum frameworks for teaching the standards in a coherent progression, or provide applications to help educators create their own frameworks. Educators can use the frameworks as guides to plan instruction and select materials from the state's repository.
- Offer instructional materials such as model lesson and unit plans, sample formative assessments, recommended texts and videos, manipulatives and multimedia learning tools for educators of all grade levels for math, ELA and literacy in the content areas, especially science and social studies; include items to support differentiated instruction.
- Post the items in a repository that is easy for educators to find and navigate. Conduct regular inventories of the repository's content, remove any items not aligned to current standards and add items to fill gaps.
- Collaborate frequently with educators to review, select, develop and update items for the repository. More involvement of educators in these processes can help ensure items meet their needs and increase item use. SEAs could use existing professional learning events or educator advisory group meetings as opportunities to involve educators and could conduct review processes online to enhance flexibility for educators.

**4 of 5** Provide educators with integrated and sustained professional learning and technical assistance to support instructional materials alignment efforts statewide. Expand or create these services to fit local contexts.

State leaders should consider the following actions.

- Expand or create programs that give educators regular opportunities to learn about the design and selection of instructional materials, along with activities to help them implement their learning, receive feedback and continuously improve. In states with an existing initiative that integrates learning and support for instructional materials alignment, the SEA can build on its initiative. In other states, the SEA could modify existing programs or launch new ones to better integrate professional learning and technical assistance, or expand its reach. Depending on the context, SEAs could work with partners such as regional centers, institutions of higher education or vendors to enhance the capacity of state agency staff and engage educators with a variety of experts. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provides states with flexibility in structuring and funding efforts in professional development, school improvement and educator effectiveness. This flexibility gives states an opportunity to reimagine how to best serve districts, schools and educators.
- Help district leaders strategically use their funds, time, programs, partnerships and internal expertise to provide their own integrated professional learning and implementation assistance for educators.
- Collaborate with other states to share ideas and resources, problem-solve and build on the experience of states that have well integrated professional learning and technical assistance programs.

## ? Why are these recommendations critical?

**By addressing the recommendations above, state leaders can strengthen their efforts and address the following two challenges that face states and educators in the alignment of instructional materials to state standards.**

**Educators have access to an increasing stream of OER on the Internet. They need a set of resources and materials that have been expertly designed or selected to align specifically to their state standards. Having such a set of materials, organized in a manageable way, would save educators time and effort and would help ensure that all educators statewide have access to consistently high-quality tools.**

Searching online, in a matter of clicks, educators can find a seemingly unlimited number of lesson plans, unit plans, student materials, assessment tools, sample texts, planning templates and more — from an ever-expanding number of organizations and individuals. Yet, many educators SREB interviewed reported that they or their colleagues felt overwhelmed by the vast array of offerings. SEAs can curate their online repositories to offer educators carefully selected OER and items developed specifically for the state.

Interviewees indicated that they did not want the state to provide a rigid or mandated curriculum. Instead, they wanted a large yet cohesive, flexible and manageable set of instructional materials that they could access as needed, knowing it had been curated by experts and educators in their state. They stressed that the repositories needed to offer the essential items listed above in recommendation 3.

*“We demand differentiated instruction from our teachers, but we have to give them something they can work from — a framework, something — so they don't have to develop the lessons, differentiate them, teach them, figure out how to improve them and redesign them. We need to save them time. It all goes back to time. We need to spend our time making them more effective teachers instead of creators of curriculum.”*

— School Leader

*“There are great OER out there, but it's a challenge because it takes an inordinate amount of time to sort through them to find ones that are directly aligned to our standards.”*

— District Leader

Educators also stressed the importance of offering guidance and materials on a user-friendly platform. Several indicated that they or teachers they knew did not use their SEA's online repository because it was too difficult to navigate. They stressed that a well-designed and well-organized platform would make it easier for educators to take advantage of the state's offerings.

A curated set of online resources is a significant type of support that SEAs can provide as districts and schools continue to shift to digital instructional materials, and away from traditional print textbooks.

State resources can be especially helpful to smaller and poorer districts, that lack the expertise or funds to conduct their own materials review and development processes.

**Many educators feel underprepared to develop their own aligned materials or choose wisely from available OER. Educators need regular, sustained opportunities to study the standards and instructional strategies for all students, build skills in materials alignment, and collaborate with others to improve.**

Educators and SEA leaders that SREB interviewed reported that many educators felt overwhelmed and underprepared to develop their own standards-aligned materials, or to choose wisely from the array of available OER. A few teachers indicated that some of the professional development on materials alignment they had attended felt like isolated events, without a long-term vision for fostering the consistent use of rigorous, standards-aligned instructional materials with all students.

Interviewees stressed that educators need regular, coordinated, sustained opportunities to study the standards and effective instructional strategies for all students. They need opportunities to build skills in creating and selecting high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials. To help educators apply their learning effectively in the classroom, educators need opportunities to practice implementing new knowledge, skills and materials, receive feedback on their efforts, and collaborate with others to improve implementation.

Research on adult learning and professional development, including work by Stanford University and the National Staff Development Council in 2009, confirms that these types of opportunities, when implemented together, foster deep learning and changes in practice. Several interviewees said that the need was greatest for teachers of math and literacy in the content areas, especially in secondary grades, and for educators in poor, rural areas and chronically underperforming schools that experience high turn-over of staff.

*“The SEA’s frameworks are everything a teacher needs for a grade level. Our state provided the frameworks and made them specific to our needs. A textbook with one-size-fits-all does not really work. The frameworks allow us to differentiate based on what kind of student we’re teaching.”*

– Teacher

## State trends in this area

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, in all 15 states, the SEA offered at least some **guidance** to districts, schools and educators, to help them build local knowledge about state college- and career-readiness standards, instructional strategies and aligning instructional materials. Guidance included information about the state standards; videos of effective teaching strategies; instructional frameworks or scope and sequence maps; templates for designing aligned instructional lessons and units; rubrics for reviewing the alignment of

*“While our teachers have become more knowledgeable about their content, we’ve found that if we don’t keep practicing the rigor, good instructional strategies, working together, then our teachers go right back to how they learned mathematics, or what is comfortable for them.”*

– District Leader

textbooks, lesson plans and unit plans; lists of adopted textbooks; and online professional learning resources such as self-paced courses and archived SEA training materials.

The types and amount of **instructional materials** SEAs offered online varied widely. Educators could access these materials on demand to help them fill gaps in local curriculum and deliver instruction. Items included model lesson and unit plans; sample formative assessment items; recommended texts and videos; and multimedia learning tools.

In all 15 states, the SEA provided services to support local efforts. They all offered educators **opportunities to learn** about aligning instructional materials – though the design and reach of these services

varied widely across the states, from very limited opportunities for individuals, to multiple and sustained opportunities for individuals and local leadership teams statewide. The types and amount of **technical assistance** offered to support local materials alignment efforts also varied widely, from very limited to extensive.

The descriptions of state efforts below can help state leaders identify areas of accomplishment and areas where the state’s resources and services could better assist educators.

## Guidance

### Types of guidance offered

SEA repositories showed the following trends in the types of guidance they offered.

- More guidance for the content area of ELA than for math or literacy in content areas such as science and social studies
- More for teachers of elementary grades than secondary grades
- Relatively little guidance on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. Seven states — Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi and Oklahoma — offered more extensive guidance on this topic than other states. These states provided items such as toolkits and training materials on [Response to Intervention](#) and the [principles of Universal Design for Learning](#), to help educators address the learning needs of all students; curriculum frameworks in different languages; and information on supporting gifted and struggling students, as well as students with disabilities and English learners.

Six states offered the most extensive guidance overall: Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina.

### Most helpful guidance

Among the teachers SREB interviewed, the guidance items they most frequently mentioned as most helpful to their efforts to acquire, develop and use instructional materials were as follows.

- Videos explaining the standards and demonstrating effective instruction
- Materials review tools such as the EQuiP, LDC and MDC, and IMET rubrics
- Curriculum guides such as frameworks, and scope and sequence maps that provide a roadmap for coordinated, coherent yearlong instruction

## Instructional materials offered online, on-demand

### Types of instructional materials offered

SEA repositories showed the following trends in the types of items they offered. These trends were similar to the trends in the guidance states offered.

- More for the content area of ELA than for math or literacy in content areas such as science and social studies
- More for teachers of elementary grades than secondary grades
- Relatively few items for formative assessment
- Relatively few items to help educators differentiate instruction for diverse learners. Four states — Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Maryland — offered more items for differentiating instruction than the others. Notable items were model unit and lesson plans specific to English learners and struggling students, materials to implement response to intervention, and adaptable formative assessment items.

### Amount and comprehensiveness of instructional materials offered

The amount of materials in SEA repositories varied widely. Six states offered the most extensive sets of items overall: Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina. These were the same six states that offered the most extensive sets of guidance.

Four states — Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Maryland — offered a substantial number and variety of materials along with yearlong instructional frameworks specific to grade levels and content areas, or

applications to help educators develop their own frameworks. Educators could use these planning tools to design comprehensive and cohesive instructional programs, and select efficiently from the other materials the SEAs offered on their platforms.

Louisiana's [Teacher Support Toolbox](#) was notable for its extensive banks of items, and for the explicit vision it provided for coherent, yearlong programs of instruction. For math, the toolbox offered grade-specific, yearlong scope and sequence documents to guide the selection of items from the toolbox, and remediation guides to support differentiated instruction for struggling students. For ELA, the toolbox offered [guidebooks](#), developed by Louisiana educators, that laid out fully developed, yearlong grade-specific curricula, including instructional units, lesson plans, texts and classroom assessments for grades three through 12. The department's companion [EAGLE 2.0](#) platform offered educators formative assessment items, sample tests and rubrics aligned to the guidebooks, and adaptable items to support classroom assessment for English learners and struggling students. Also notable was Louisiana's coordination of the online resources with services to support aligned instruction. The SEA offered training for [teacher leaders](#) across the state on how to implement the units in the guidebooks, and it provided information to districts on how to purchase teacher training packages on materials that the SEA had recommended through its Curricular Resources Annotated Review. This combination of resources and services could save educators time, and lend expertise to instructional planning and delivery that may have been lacking at the local level.

Alabama's [ALEX](#) platform, Florida's [CPALMS](#) platform, and Maryland's [Online Instructional Toolkit](#) and content area Web pages offered extensive sets of individual resources and either sample yearlong standards progression maps, or applications to enable users to develop their own maps. Alabama's [Insight Tool](#) on ALEX and Florida's [iCPALMS](#) application on CPALMS enabled users to develop their own standards progression maps, organize their selected sets of resources in the platform and share them with other educators.

### User-friendliness of state online resource repositories

The user-friendliness of SEA repositories varied across states. SREB researchers found that some SEAs posted their offerings on several different Web pages, not all of which were easy to find or to navigate. In five states – Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee – the repositories were particularly easy to find, navigate and search. In Georgia and Maryland, teachers shared that they frequently used their SEA's repository because it was easy to use and contained rich resources.

### Efforts to improve state repositories

SEA leaders in several states reported that in 2014-15 and 2015-16, their agency worked to enhance the state's online repository. They reported the following three main types of enhancements.

1. Increasing educator access to high-quality, standards-aligned OER. Eight states began or continued participation in multi-state OER initiatives. The OER sites mentioned most were [Open Up Resources](#) (formerly the K-12 OER Collaborative), [LearnZillion](#), [LDC](#), [MDC](#), [Khan Academy](#), the digital library of the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) or the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers \(PARCC\)](#) assessment consortium, the U.S. Department of Education's [#GoOpen](#) initiative, and other states' repositories, especially New York's [EngageNY](#).
2. Enhancing the user-friendliness of the repository, for example by reorganizing items to be searchable by standard, grade and subject area; and by merging items across multiple pages into a one-stop-shop repository.
3. Building educator awareness about and educator use of the repository. In eight states, SEA leaders reported updating educators about the items available through regular emails and notices on the agency's website, to encourage more use of the posted items.

## Professional learning and technical assistance

### Professional learning

In all 15 states, the SEA offered training on the state standards and curriculum alignment for multiple groups of educators, including teachers and school and district leaders. However, the design and reach of these services varied greatly. States with the least extensive services offered a few training sessions open to any teacher or leader statewide, for example, through a webinar or annual summer institute.

The most comprehensive and sustained professional learning for specific role groups included the following.

- For teachers: Louisiana's [Teacher Leader](#) program; Arkansas's and Kentucky's wide-reaching [LDC and MDC](#) initiatives; and Tennessee's [summer teacher trainings](#) and follow-up regional center support.
- For leaders in schools and districts: Tennessee's [leadership course](#), regional instructional supervisor collaboratives, networked improvement communities and district-level instructional coach training; and Louisiana's [Principal Fellowship](#) program and [TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement](#).

Content areas and topics addressed in state-provided professional learning included the following.

- All states reported offering some amount of training in the content areas of ELA and math.
- Almost all states offered at least some training on how to use state-recommended rubrics to design and select aligned instructional materials.
- In eight states — Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma and West Virginia — the SEA offered training, either itself or in collaboration with partners such as SREB, on LDC and MDC practices and tools. Arkansas, Georgia and Kentucky reached large numbers of districts and schools.
- All states offered at least some training on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners and close achievement gaps. However, the amount and reach of the training was very limited. Only Delaware made this a major focus of its work with school and district leadership teams in 2015-16, in the Common Ground for the Common Core initiative.

### Technical assistance

All states offered some type of technical assistance to schools identified through the statewide accountability system as in need of improvement. Other assistance specific to the alignment of instructional materials varied in amount and reach.

- In Delaware and Maryland, the SEA provided substantial, regular technical assistance to all districts through monthly or quarterly meetings with multiple specialists in each district.
- In Georgia, Kentucky and North Carolina, department field specialists, coaches or regional centers supported implementation of LDC and MDC practices and tools in a large number of schools and districts.
- In Tennessee and West Virginia, the SEA and regional centers facilitated communities of practice. In Tennessee, the SEA worked with regional instructional supervisor collaboratives and Networked Improvement Communities that involved large numbers of district leaders. In West Virginia, regional centers and district leaders collaborated to support a small number of volunteer Catalyst Schools, with plans to expand to all 727 schools in the state in 2016-17.
- In Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee, the department worked with regional centers to offer a variety of services. The type and amount of services delivered varied across the state based on a number of factors, including differences in regional capacity, local needs and district participation.

## Notable efforts to provide integrated and intensive professional learning and technical assistance

In five states — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina — the SEA provided regular technical assistance to local leadership teams as part of the SEA's flagship professional learning program for the state college- and career-readiness standards. The SEA, often in collaboration with regional centers or other partners, provided teams of teachers, and school and district leaders from most — if not all — districts with frequent, intensive learning experiences such as monthly or quarterly, day-long institutes. Regular support activities were woven into the schedule of learning events to help the teams implement and spread the knowledge and skills they gained. For example, teams participated in collaborative reviews of implementation data, received feedback on their efforts, and shared ideas with the SEA and other teams from across the state.

These states provide a model for the integration of state programs and services that other states might consider adapting to fit their local contexts. These integrated, “wrap around” services increased the number and ways in which participants interacted with the target knowledge, skills, practices and tools, increasing the chances that their learning would result in changes in their practice and improvements in student learning.

**Table 7:**

### *Integrated, Intensive State Professional Learning and Technical Assistance Initiatives to Support Local Alignment of Instructional Materials*

State	Name or focus of initiative	Timeline for initiative	Scale of participation	Professional learning component	Technical assistance component
Alabama	District Implementation Teams	Ongoing since 2012-13	All 136 districts	Quarterly, all-day meetings with district implementation teams of teachers, and school and district leaders	Tailored assistance for districts from SEA regional staff, and from Regional In-Service Centers; quarterly meetings for district curriculum and instruction directors
Delaware	Common Ground for the Common Core	2013-14 to 2015-16	136 of the state's 225 schools, representing 18 of 19 districts	Regular, three-day convenings with guiding teams of teachers, and school and district leaders	Regular school-based clinics to look at implementation data and problem solve; school site visits; virtual coaching
Kentucky	Leadership Networks	2010-11 to 2016-17	All 173 districts	Monthly, full-day, role-specific meetings and follow-up sessions for teams of school and district leaders (included ELA and math teachers through 2013-14)	Tailored technical assistance for districts teams from regional instructional specialists and regional educational cooperatives
Louisiana	District Support Networks	Ongoing since 2013-14	All 131 districts	Quarterly, half-day collaboration events for teams of district leaders (coordinated with learning events for teachers in the Teacher Leader initiative)	Quarterly meetings with district teams and regular webinars, planning calls and weekly newsletters
North Carolina	District teams	2010-11 to 2014-15	All 115 districts	Summer institutes for teams of teachers and district leaders	Biannual fidelity support sessions, online resources and extensive, ongoing regional trainings

## Funding for state efforts

SEAs reported three main ways in which they used state funds, federal funds or grants to enhance their leadership and support for the statewide identification and use of standards-aligned instructional materials.

1. To fund positions, such as content area specialists, working at the SEA office or in the field with districts and schools
2. To provide professional learning services, or online instructional materials
3. To develop or improve technology, such as state online resource repositories



## Area 3

### Using data to continuously improve state efforts

SEAs can use data to continuously improve their leadership and support for the statewide alignment of instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards. **To best use data to drive their efforts, SEAs can**

- **Gather multiple types of data on a regular basis.**  
Key types of data include the following.
  - educator use of SEA guidance and materials, and educator participation in SEA support services
  - educator perceptions of the quality of the guidance, materials and support services the SEA offers
  - emerging needs of educators for aligned teaching materials
  - the impact of educator use of, and participation in, the state's offerings such as changes in adult knowledge and practice, and student outcomes
  - local practices for selecting and developing textbooks and other instructional materials
- **Use the data gathered on a regular basis** to identify what is working well and where changes are needed in state policies, programs, resources and services to improve efforts to align instructional materials and address educator and student needs.



### Highlights from states doing strong work in this area

**Eleven states exhibited strong efforts in this area: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.** These states regularly gathered at least three types of data. They involved multiple levels of leadership and staff across the agency, as well as partners and educators, in discussions of the data. They used the data in at least two ways to improve the SEAs leadership and support for the statewide identification and use of aligned instructional materials.

**Four of these states also reported collecting data on the impact of the state's efforts** on educator knowledge and practice, or student achievement, though this type of data provides critical information to help leaders determine how to best allocate funds, effort and time. Only Arkansas, Delaware, Tennessee and West Virginia reported gathering data on the impact of state resources and services. Two of these states' efforts are described below.

#### Tennessee

- **Multiple types of data gathered regularly:** The Tennessee Department of Education frequently gathered all five types of data that SREB deemed key for strong state leadership (listed above). The department tracked trends in educator usage of the [eduToolbox](#) (formerly TNCORE) resource repository, and educator usage of information in the department's bi-weekly update emails. The department measured educator

perceptions of the quality of the state's offerings, and identified emerging educator needs through regular focus groups and meetings with educator advisory groups. Notably, the department also evaluated the impact of teacher participation in its summer trainings, examining both teacher and student outcome data. Additionally, the department gathered data on local curriculum alignment practices through annual district textbook selection reports and a statewide survey of districts. The department gathered these data in cycles ranging from bi-weekly to annually.

- **Multiple uses of data:** The department used the data it gathered in three ways for continuous improvement. These included developing and refining support services based on educator needs, developing and enhancing the department's online resource repositories, and determining how to better promote and increase educator use of the department's online resources.
- **Inclusive routines for using data:** In 2015, the department reorganized and developed strategic plans to guide its initiatives. Staff from various offices across the agency served on teams that met quarterly to measure progress on those plans. Additionally, teams at different levels of leadership within the department — the commissioner's executive leadership team, the senior leadership team of directors from multiple offices, and the academic leadership team of staff from across the department and regional offices — met on an ongoing basis to analyze data, identify needs and plan initiatives. Educator advisory groups met quarterly with the commissioner to provide advice on the agency's progress and discuss educator needs. The department also involved key partners in its analysis and use of data, for example, when department staff collaborated with Lipscomb University to design the eduToolbox website.

### Delaware

- **Multiple types of data gathered regularly:** The Delaware Department of Education frequently gathered all five types of data that SREB deemed key for strong state leadership (listed above). The department tracked educator use of its resources and tools through annual site visits to a school from every district. The department gathered data on educator perceptions of the quality of its resources and services through several surveys. The department gauged educator needs through monthly meetings with content specialists from all districts, state assessment results and school site visits. Notably, the department gathered data on the impact of participation in two major state initiatives by examining trends in student assessment scores at participating schools. The department gathered data on local curriculum alignment practices through annual reviews of local standards implementation plans, annual reviews of instructional materials in low-performing districts and reviews of materials in districts using Title III funds to serve English learners. The department gathered these data in cycles ranging from monthly to bi-annually.
- **Multiple uses of data:** The department used its data in three ways for continuous improvement. These included developing professional learning and technical assistance for districts and schools, enhancing the department's online resources and materials, and tailoring feedback to schools on their standards implementation plans.
- **Inclusive routines for using data:** Leaders of offices across the department used the agency's College- and Career-Ready Plans to guide their efforts in curriculum alignment. The secretary of education, associate secretaries and directors from across the agency met three times a year to track progress on those efforts. Department staff met monthly with content specialists and instructional coaches from all 19 districts to discuss the agency's data and progress, share best practices, and develop new state resources and services to meet educator needs.



## Recommendations based on state trends in this area

Based on the trends in state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16, state education leaders should consider the following recommendation, to strengthen decision making about the use of funds, effort and time to support statewide alignment of instructional materials to state standards.

**5 of 5** Foster more use of data and research by the SEA, educators and partners. Promote access to high-quality research on the standards alignment and effectiveness of available instructional materials and professional development on aligning materials. Study the alignment and effectiveness of the state's own materials and services.

Teachers and leaders at the state and local levels need better information on the alignment of instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards. They need to better understand how the use of instructional materials and participation in professional development on materials alignment impacts educator practice and student learning. This information will help decision-makers focus funds, time and effort on strategies that are more likely to make a difference. State leaders should consider the following actions.

- **Promote access to high-quality information and research on the standards alignment and effectiveness of available instructional materials and professional development in improving the quality of teaching tools, educator practice and student learning.**
  - Disseminate information from nationally recognized topical experts and leading states. Topical expert organizations include [EdReports.org](http://EdReports.org) and [Student Achievement Partners](http://StudentAchievementPartners.org). Leading state efforts include Louisiana's [Curricular Resources Annotated Review](#).
  - Disseminate the findings from high-quality research on the effectiveness of instructional materials and teacher training. The U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#) and Johns Hopkins University's [Evidence for ESSA site](#) and [Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#) provide expertly curated information on instructional materials and professional development programs that have been rigorously studied and been found to improve practice and outcomes.
- **Study the alignment and effectiveness of the state's own materials and services.** Studying the SEA's own efforts to foster instructional materials alignment offers a benefit no other research can match: relatability and relevance. Educators place a high premium on knowing what materials and professional development have worked well for colleagues in neighboring classrooms, schools and districts. Information from local colleagues helps assure educators that a particular set of tools or training on materials alignment would have a good chance of working in their own setting. Research on the SEA's own efforts also provides policymakers with information about the effectiveness of their own efforts that is more precise than any of the other types of data, listed above, that SEAs collect.

Conducting research can be demanding and resource-intensive, making it a challenge for SEAs with limited staffs and budgets. State leaders should consider the following approaches, and modify them according to local opportunities and constraints.

- SEA staff could conduct evaluations of the agency's professional learning initiatives that include training on how to align instructional materials, as [Kentucky](#) and [Tennessee](#) did.
- The SEA could partner with external entities such as non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education and regional educational laboratories to study state-specific programs and materials, as [Florida](#), [Kentucky](#), [Mississippi](#), [North Carolina](#) and [Tennessee](#) did.

- SEAs could work together and pool resources, time and expertise to study materials and programs that they all use. Leaders in several SEAs shared with SREB that they had great interest in working with peers in other states to enhance their resources and services. To fund such projects, participants could use and apply for state funding, federal funding and grants. See the grant-funded study [Kentucky](#) participated in, as part of a multi-state effort to align instructional units to state standards.



### Why is this recommendation critical?

**By addressing the recommendation above, state leaders can strengthen their efforts and address the following two challenges that face states as they seek to continuously improve their leadership and support for instructional materials alignment.**

**Relatively little rigorous research has been conducted on the effectiveness of instructional materials or professional development on materials alignment in improving teaching and learning.** For example, in 2012, Chingos and Whitehurst pointed out that the majority of elementary school mathematics curricula examined by the U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#) — the arm of the agency charged with providing educators with information they need to make evidence-based decisions — either had no studies of their effectiveness or had no studies that met reasonable standards of rigor.

Since then, studies have emerged to enlarge the research base. A 2017 Brookings Institution study of textbooks in California and a 2016 Harvard University study of textbooks and instruction in five states (including two SREB states) both found significantly higher student achievement in classrooms using certain textbooks versus others. In 2014 and 2015, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing studied LDC and MDC programs, involving professional development on standards-aligned instructional strategies and the use of specific materials. Teachers reported that the training and materials helped them better teach their state standards, and researchers identified positive impacts on student achievement on state assessments for participating teachers. A 2017 meta-analysis of research on the effect of curriculum materials, conducted by experts at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and Center for Research and Reform in Education, found that curriculum materials have a critical impact on students' academic success, and that the cumulative effect of exposure to high-quality curriculum materials across a student's academic career can be significant.

Even given these encouraging findings, much more research is needed to build a robust, reliable body of research to inform decisions about instructional materials and curriculum alignment training for teachers.

**Without rigorous studies of whether resources and training lead to changes in educator practice and student learning, policymakers have little evidence to guide decisions about how to improve.** These include decisions about how best to spend the time and effort of state staff and educators, and how to allocate public dollars to improve the materials and instruction students experience. Although the financial and human capital needed to study the effectiveness of state services and materials can be great, when armed with timely results, policymakers can direct funds and effort to programs that work, and stop funding programs that do not.

## State trends in this area

SEA leaders in a majority of the 15 states reported that their agency had **collected more data** in 2014-15 and 2015-16 than it had in previous years. SEA leaders in nine states reported gathering **multiple types of data on at least an annual basis**.

All 15 states reported that the SEA regularly **analyzed and used data** to inform at least one key aspect of the agency's work to support instructional materials alignment statewide. In almost all states, personnel from various divisions or offices in the SEA, including both leaders and staff members, participated in the agency's use of data for continuous improvement. In 11 states, SEA leaders met regularly with educators to discuss data, and in seven states SEA leaders consulted with partners, such as regional centers and universities.

**Few states collected two types of data that SREB considers critical** for informing decisions on allocating funding, time and effort to improve teaching and learning; local curriculum alignment practices, and the impact of using state-provided or recommended resources and support on educator practice and student achievement.

The descriptions of state efforts below can help state leaders identify areas of accomplishment in the use of data, and areas where improvements to the state's efforts are needed.

### Data collection

#### Types of data collected

Five types of data are key for helping state leaders understand the status of materials alignment efforts statewide and determine next steps for enhancing state leadership and support.

1. Patterns in educator use of state resources and services
2. Educators' perceptions of the quality of the guidance, resources and support services the SEA offers
3. Emerging needs of educators for aligned teaching materials
4. Impact of educator use of, and participation in, the state's offerings such as changes in adult knowledge and practice and student outcomes
5. Local practices for selecting and developing textbooks, and other instructional materials

In all 15 states, the SEA gathered at least one of these types of data. In 13 states, the SEA gathered three or more types.

The three most commonly collected types of data were as follows.

1. Patterns in educator use of state guidance, materials and support services. For example, SEAs tallied attendance at professional learning and technical assistance events, and tracked the types and amounts of information and materials viewed and downloaded through SEA online resource repositories. Kentucky and Tennessee also tracked trends in the length of time users spent on resources and links.
2. Educator perceptions of the quality of the state's guidance, materials and support services. For example, SEAs collected feedback from educators through training session evaluation forms and surveys, and solicited suggestions from educator advisory groups. Kentucky, North Carolina and West Virginia also requested that users of the SEA repository rate posted items for quality and usefulness.
3. Emerging educator needs for guidance, materials and support. For example, SEAs tracked requests for assistance from teachers and district leaders, and identified student learning needs through trends

and gaps in statewide student assessment data. Arkansas and Delaware conducted school site visits to observe practices and dialogue with educators.

The two least commonly collected types of data were as follows.

1. Local curriculum alignment practices. In 11 states, the SEA reported gathering information about local curriculum alignment practices. The kinds, depth and comprehensiveness of the data varied widely.
  - In Alabama, Delaware and Maryland, the SEA annually reviewed district or school improvement plans.
  - In Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee, the SEA gathered information directly from districts or educators through interactions during training and support activities, surveys or phone calls.
  - In Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia, districts reported to the state which textbooks they selected, and sometimes which other curriculum materials they purchased, such as formative assessments. In some of these states, districts reported annually, and in others, districts reported according to the state textbook adoption cycle, which could be once every several years. In at least one of these states, districts reported on which textbooks they purchased from the state-adopted list, while those they purchased outside the list were not reported.
  - Four states conducted site visits. Alabama, Kentucky and Louisiana conducted periodic visits to districts, and Delaware conducted annual visits to one school from every district.
2. Impact of using state-provided or recommended materials and services on educator practice and student learning. Only four states — Arkansas, Delaware, Tennessee and West Virginia — reported collecting such data. These states conducted the following activities.
  - Delaware, Tennessee and West Virginia looked at trends in annual statewide student assessment data for participants in state programs or users of state resources.
  - Tennessee and West Virginia examined trends in teacher and leader evaluation results at schools participating in state professional learning.
  - Arkansas administered pre- and post-assessments of adult knowledge to users of state professional learning resources.

SEAs reported that they reviewed these data internally. SREB did not identify published findings related to these data.

### Frequency of data collection

All 15 states reported gathering data on a regular basis to continually improve state leadership and support for instructional materials alignment. In nine states, the SEA gathered at least one type of data on at least an annual basis. Frequency of data collection varied based on a myriad of factors, such as the frequency of professional learning offerings, textbook adoption cycles and scheduled meetings with partners. States also collected different types of data at different frequencies.

Eight states – Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina and Tennessee – gathered at least one type of data more than annually. For example, several states gathered data on educator perceptions and needs on a monthly or quarterly basis, through trends in use of the agency’s online resources, and feedback during professional learning and technical assistance meetings. Table 8 presents the frequency of the most-regularly collected data source that each state reported.

**Table 8:***Frequency of State Data Collection, for Most Frequently Collected Data*

State	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Varied
Alabama			X		
Arkansas					X
Delaware		X			
Florida		X			
Georgia					X
Kentucky		X			
Louisiana		X			
Maryland		X			
Mississippi					X
North Carolina		X			
Oklahoma					X
South Carolina					X
Tennessee	X				
Virginia				X	
West Virginia					X

Note: Frequency of data collection varied based on a myriad of factors, such as frequency of professional learning offerings, textbook adoption cycles and scheduled meetings with educators and partners. States also may have collected different kinds of data at different frequencies. This table presents the frequency of the most-regularly collected data that each state reported.

## Data analysis and use

### How states used the data to continuously improve

Across states, the two most frequently cited uses for data were as follows.

- To inform decisions about how to improve the SEA's online resource repository
- To identify ways to enhance the agency's professional learning and technical assistance services

Other notable uses of the data include the following.

- Alabama used data on local curriculum selection practices to provide feedback to district leaders on their professional development and college- and career-readiness standards implementation plans.
- Louisiana identified best practices in aligning instructional materials in districts demonstrating high rates of student growth on annual student assessments, and shared these practices with districts statewide.

### Structures and routines established by SEA leadership to foster the extensive and collaborative use of data

The most common structures SEAs had in place for the collaborative analysis of data to drive improvement were regular meetings of the agency's executive leadership, coordinated with regular meetings of middle-level leadership. For example, on a weekly or monthly basis, the chief state school officer met with key deputies. Information and decisions from those meetings informed the regular meetings of division or

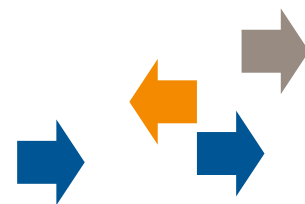
program directors. In Tennessee, the SEA had three teams that coordinated across all levels and divisions in the agency to use data. These were the commissioner of education's executive leadership team of deputy commissioners, senior leadership team of assistant commissioners, and the academic leadership team of assistant commissioners, executive directors and regional staff.

In 2014-15 or 2015-16, the chief state school officer in three states — Louisiana, Maryland and Tennessee — had led a reorganization of SEA staff in the previous few years to improve productivity and eliminate silos across the agency to enhance the use of data.

In 11 states, SEAs reported meeting regularly with educators. This typically included meetings of the chief state school officer with educator advisory groups. In four states — Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee — SEAs had a working group of staff members and other stakeholders, such as educators and curriculum vendors, dedicated to continuous improvement of the agency's online resource repository.

In six states — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina — district and school leaders also participated in the state's use of data. In these states, the SEA used state professional learning and support structures to collect data about local instructional materials alignment. The SEA also used these structures as forums for using the data they collected to provide information and feedback to local leadership teams to support their materials alignment efforts. In these states, initiatives that fostered collaboration between the SEA and local leaders helped strengthen the curriculum alignment efforts of both.

In seven states, the SEA reported regularly consulting with partners, such as regional centers and universities, as part of the SEA's routines for using data. In Florida, an advisory group for the CPALMS online repository met every two weeks to analyze data. This group included staff at the SEA and key partners, such as the Florida Center for Research in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and an external evaluator.







## III. Moving Forward: Support for States to Implement the Recommendations

This section of the report brings together the recommendations from each area, describes support SEAs may need to carry out the recommendations, and provides examples of tools and organizations that may help state leaders as they address the recommendations.



### Recommendations based on state trends

#### Area 1: Establishing clear conventions for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials

##### Recommendation 1

Verify that the criteria for developing and selecting instructional materials fully and accurately reflect the content and rigor of the state college- and career-readiness standards, and that consistent criteria are applied to textbooks and other instructional materials.

##### Recommendation 2

Use regular and frequent processes that involve educators to develop and select instructional materials that align to the standards educators are responsible for implementing, and address educator needs for tools to deliver rigorous instruction to all students.

#### Area 2: Supporting local efforts to identify and use aligned instructional materials

##### Recommendation 3

Offer educators a substantial number and variety of guidance documents and aligned instructional materials. Ensure that the SEA's online resource repository is easy for educators to find and navigate.

##### Recommendation 4

Provide educators with integrated and sustained professional learning and technical assistance to support instructional materials alignment statewide. Expand or create these services to fit local contexts.

#### Area 3: Using data to continuously improve state efforts

##### Recommendation 5

Foster more use of data and research by the SEA, educators and partners. Promote access to high-quality research on the standards alignment and effectiveness of available instructional materials and professional development on aligning materials. Study the alignment and effectiveness of the state's own materials and services.

## Support states need to implement the recommendations

Regardless of the many differences among the 15 states, **SEA leaders agreed their agencies continue to need the following types of support to provide the resources and services that educators need** to implement the standards with fidelity and improve student achievement:

- **Additional time, staff, expertise and professional development** to dedicate more capacity to needed tasks;
- **Opportunities to collaborate** with others on aligning instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards, including entities within their state such as regional education centers, institutes of higher education and educators, as well as leaders in other states and expert partners; and
- **Funding**, as available, to help establish and sustain needed efforts.

SEA leaders noted that these types of support will also **enhance other aspects of state work to help all students achieve college and career readiness**, including the following.

- **Better integrate the SEA's work on curriculum with other efforts**, such as professional learning, educator effectiveness, assessment, accountability, high school course pathways and graduation requirements.
- **Enhance the SEA's communication with educators** to increase educator involvement in state initiatives and their use of instructional resources and support offered or recommended by the state.
- **Foster more collaborative learning**, problem solving and improvement among educators in classrooms, school buildings, and districts within states as well as across states.

**Integrating work on curriculum alignment with other college- and career-readiness initiatives**

*“You're never finished checking the boxes.”*

– SEA Staff Member

*“In the past, we haven't done a good job integrating our work. It's very hard to do, and it's constant. You can't just set up structures or create a few tools and think you've achieved it. We work very hard at it because we believe that a teacher experiences all of this work as one thing. It should all be centered around a vision for student learning.”*

– SEA Staff Member

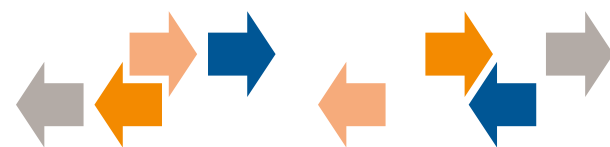
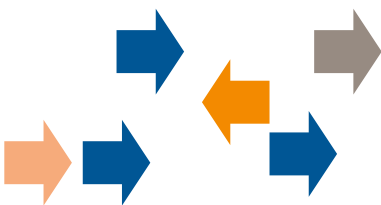
## Examples of organizations and tools to help states

As states strive to carry out the recommendations, they may draw on the types of tools and organizations that were helpful to states in this study in 2014-15 and 2015-16, listed below.

- **Nationally recognized tools to guide the alignment of instructional** to college- and career-readiness standards, and the organizations that offered them free of charge
  - [IMET](#) and [AET](#) tools from Student Achievement Partners
  - Materials [review tools](#) from EdReports.org
  - [EQuIP](#) and [OER](#) rubrics from Achieve, as well as the Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in [Mathematics](#) and [ELA/Literacy](#) that Achieve developed with the National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council of the Great City Schools and National Association of State Boards of Education
- **Partner organizations to help SEAs enhance their tools, services and programs**
  - Regional education centers within a state, and technical assistance partners such as [SREB](#), to help design and deliver tools and services to large numbers of districts, schools and educators
  - Organizations that facilitate collaborative instructional materials development and dissemination, such

as [Open Up Resources](#) (formerly the K-12 OER Collaborative), [LearnZillion](#), the [Smarter Balanced](#) and the [PARCC](#) assessment consortia, and the U.S. Department of Education along with multiple organizations such as Amazon Education, EdModo and Microsoft, as part of the [#GoOpen](#) initiative.

- **Research experts to assist with evaluations of state initiatives**
  - Non-profit groups such as the SERVE Center, Friday Institute, Mass Insight Education, and Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development
  - Institutions of higher education
  - [Regional educational laboratories](#), federally funded to support states with research and evaluation
- **State legislatures to fund the following types of support**
  - Staff positions such as content area specialists at the SEA and regional centers
  - Professional learning and technical assistance services to build local capacity to develop, review and select instructional materials that are high quality and aligned to state standards
  - Local purchases of instructional materials aligned to state standards
  - Technology to enhance materials alignment and dissemination efforts, such as SEA online resource repositories and online professional learning applications
- **Federal funding to enhance state and local efforts.** ESSA of 2015 provides states with flexibility in structuring and funding efforts in professional development, school improvement and educator effectiveness. This flexibility gives states an opportunity to reimagine how to best help districts, schools and educators align their instructional materials and use aligned materials effectively in the classroom.
- **External funders to enable states to take action and sustain initiatives** in their own states and across states, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, National Science Foundation and Carnegie Foundation



# Appendix

## Look-fors

In each of the following tables, the look-fors column lists the criteria SREB used to analyze state efforts. The Xs in the other columns represent SREB’s method of assessing how states addressed the look-fors at each level of implementation. Notes in parentheses indicate variations in meeting a look-for.

<b>AREA 1. The SEA established clear conventions for identifying high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials</b>			
<b>Look-Fors</b>	<b>Level of State Implementation</b>		
	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Essential</b>	<b>Strong</b>
<i>SEA has established...</i>			
A. Clear <b>criteria</b> , such as the specifications in a rubric, to assess the quality and standards-alignment of <i>textbooks</i> , as well as the <i>online, on-demand instructional materials</i> that the SEA recommended or made available to educators. The criteria for textbooks was used at the state level if the state had authority to adopt textbooks, or was recommended by the SEA to guide local textbook selection if the state did not have such authority.	<i>state used only the standards themselves to review materials</i>	X	X <b>and</b> , [1] SEA ensured that its criteria fully and accurately reflected the content and rigor of the state standards – for example, by using nationally recognized tools or submitting state-developed tools to third-party experts for review, and [2] the criteria used to review textbooks was consistent with those used to review online, on-demand resources and materials
B. A clear <b>process</b> that involved educators, to develop, review, select and update high-quality, standards-aligned <i>textbooks</i> as well as online, <i>on-demand materials</i> that the SEA recommended or made available to the field. The on-demand materials were kept current through review on at least an annual basis.		X	X <b>and</b> , SEA ensured that online, on-demand items met emerging needs through review more than annually – for example, quarterly
Notes:			
1. Nationally recognized tools include the <a href="#">Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET)</a> and <a href="#">Assessment Evaluation Tool (AET)</a> from Student Achievement Partners, and the <a href="#">Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQIP) rubrics</a> and <a href="#">Open Educational Resource (OER) rubrics</a> from Achieve. These tools all derived their expectations and criteria from the Publishers’ Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in <a href="#">Mathematics</a> and <a href="#">ELA/Literacy</a> .			
2. Experts external to the SEA could include trusted, independent, third parties such as the organizations listed in the note above, and <a href="#">EdReports.org</a> ; higher education faculty members with expertise in curriculum development and deep knowledge of the state’s standards; or others.			

## AREA 2. The SEA supported local efforts to identify and use aligned instructional materials

Look-Fors	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	Essential	Strong
<i>SEA provided...</i>			
A. <b>Guidance</b> to help districts, schools and teachers build their knowledge about the standards and instructional strategies, and strengthen their skills in developing and selecting aligned instructional materials. SEA provided at least several pieces of guidance, of more than one type — for example, information about the standards and aligned instruction and assessment, rubrics for gauging alignment of instructional plans, templates for designing aligned instruction, and lists of adopted textbooks.	<i>few guidance documents</i>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> <b>and</b> , [1] <i>extensive guidance of multiple types, and [2] a user-friendly online resource repository</i>
B. <b>Instructional materials</b> for educators to access online and on demand to help to fill gaps in local curriculum and provide instruction in the classroom. SEA provided at least several items — for example, model lesson and unit plans, sample formative assessments, sample classroom materials such as manipulatives, recommended texts and videos or multimedia learning tools.	<i>few resources and materials</i>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> <b>and</b> , [1] <i>extensive materials of multiple types, and [2] a user-friendly online resource repository</i>
C. <b>Professional learning and technical assistance</b> , to build local knowledge and skills, and to strengthen local practices for developing and selecting high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials. Included training on the review criteria used or recommended at the state level in the Area 1 look-fors (above). Services may have been provided by the SEA itself, or in collaboration with regional centers or other partners.		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> <b>and</b> , provided <u>both</u> <i>professional learning and technical assistance that was coordinated, integrated and sustained, and that reached a large number of districts, schools or educators</i>

Notes:

1. "User-friendly" means SEA repositories and websites housing guidance and instructional materials were easy to find, navigate and search; items were well-organized.
2. "Few" can mean one or two; "several" can mean three or more; "extensive" can mean four or more.
3. "Multiple types" means at least three types of guidance, and online materials, that go beyond very basic descriptions of and information about the standards.

AREA 3. The SEA used data to continuously improve its efforts			
Look-Fors	Level of State Implementation		
	Minimal	Essential	Strong
<p><i>SEA has...</i></p> <p><b>A. Regularly gathered multiple types of data.</b> Types of data that SREB considered key for driving continuous improvement included the following.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educator use of the guidance and instructional materials that the SEA provided, and educator participation in the support services the SEA offered</li> <li>2. Educator perceptions of the quality of state guidance, instructional materials and support services</li> <li>3. Emerging needs of educators for aligned teaching materials</li> <li>4. Impact of educator use of, and participation in, the state's offerings such as changes in adult knowledge and practice and student outcomes</li> <li>5. Local practices for selecting and developing textbooks and other instructional materials</li> </ol>	<p><i>infrequent or fewer than three types of data gathered</i></p>	X	X
<p><b>B. Used the data gathered</b> to continuously improve the state's leadership and support for statewide alignment of instructional materials to college- and career-readiness standards.</p>		X	X <i>and, had at least two examples of data use</i>
<p><b>C. Structures, routines and responsibilities</b> in place to foster the extensive and collaborative use of data by multiple levels of staff and leadership across the agency, partners and educators.</p>			X



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