SREB

Professional Learning
Trends in State Efforts

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Executive Summary

Introduction

To implement the college- and career-readiness standards that all states have adopted since 2010, educators need to be experts in the standards and aligned instruction so their students can master the standards and prepare themselves for success after graduation. State education agencies (SEA), districts, schools and educators have used professional learning more than any other resource to build the necessary teacher knowledge and skills.

To support states, SREB worked with education leaders in SREB states and national experts to identify four areas of work through which states can foster high-quality professional learning for all educators on state college- and career-readiness standards.

For each of the four areas, SREB developed a set of expected actions — "look-fors" — for state leaders to take that fulfill their leadership in the area. Through Internet research and interviews with state education leaders and educators, **SREB gathered data on efforts in 15 states in each of the areas in 2014-15 and 2015-16**. The look-fors guided SREB's assessment of efforts in each state and across states. **See the <u>appendix</u> for a description of the project and the look-fors.** Detailed state profiles are available on the <u>project Web page</u>.

Findings

1 Establish clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on the state college- and career-readiness standards

Trends in state efforts

- State leaders have increasingly grounded their leadership of professional learning on updated standards for professional learning.

- These standards set expectations of excellence for practitioners and professional learning providers and serve as a basis for holding the state, districts, schools and providers accountable for delivering high-quality learning experiences to meet the needs of students and educators.

- Additionally, two states launched major initiatives to improve professional learning on college- and career-readiness standards.

Strong state efforts

Seven states have undertaken strong efforts in this area — Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi and West Virginia — including the following actions.

- Adopting statewide professional learning standards to establish clear expectations that the state, districts, schools and other providers implement high-quality professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards.

- Adopting policies to assist districts, schools and other providers in implementing the state standards for professional learning, such as a statewide definition of professional learning and requirements for local professional learning systems.

2 Provide guidance, technical assistance and other support for local efforts

Guidance and tools

Trends in state efforts

- All of the states provide at least general guidance, resources and tools on professional learning to support school and district improvement. Ten states provide additional, in-depth guidance and tools on professional learning, specifically for the state college- and career-readiness standards, such as implementation rubrics and manuals.

- While state online repositories of on-demand guidance and tools have continued to grow, all of the states' repositories offer more tools on planning, designing and delivering professional learning than on the critical tasks of monitoring implementation of professional learning and evaluating its effectiveness.

- Twelve states require induction or mentoring programs for new teachers, and six require such programs for new principals or local superintendents. These programs provide timely opportunities for new practitioners to learn how to implement their state's college- and career-readiness standards and receive feedback on their practice. In four of the states, the SEA has provided extensive support for local programs, and in three states the SEA has helped to monitor or evaluate the quality of local programs.

Strong state efforts

Eight states have undertaken strong efforts in this area — Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and Tennessee — including the following actions.

- Providing in-depth guidance, tools and rubrics for online, on-demand access to support local planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards.

- Offering extensive resources for delivering, and exemplars of, professional learning on the state college- and career-readiness standards — for example, materials, tools, videos, courses, and exemplars from comprehensive professional learning programs that can both serve as items for immediate use in local activities and as models to support local program development.

Technical assistance

Trends in state efforts

- In all of the states, the SEA has focused its technical assistance efforts on schools in need of improvement and their districts. Typical services have included support for data analysis to identify professional learning needs, coaching and planning advice, and monitoring the progress of improvement efforts.

- In addition to providing technical assistance to schools needing improvement and their districts, in most states the SEA or regional education centers offer some assistance to all districts. However, the type and degree of assistance delivered has varied widely, depending on a variety of factors including differences in regional center capacity and district participation.

- In five states, the SEA designed its flagship professional learning initiative for the state college- and career-readiness standards — in which leadership teams in a large number of (and in some cases, all) districts or schools have participated — to weave regular technical assistance activities into the schedule of ongoing learning events. The integration of learning and support increases the chances that participants' learning will result in changes in practice and improvement in student learning.

Strong state efforts

Six states have undertaken strong efforts in this area — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina — including the following actions.

- Working intensively with leadership teams in large numbers of — and in some cases, *all* — districts or schools. This assistance develops participants' knowledge of and skills to implement the standards and builds their collective capacity to provide high-quality professional learning for local educators.

- Providing targeted support to teacher leaders and district directors of curriculum and professional development to build local expertise.

Technology and flexibility for innovation

Trends in state efforts

- SEAs have expanded their use of technology to support professional learning. They have continued to build and populate digital repositories of on-demand professional learning guidance, resources and tools. These repositories increase educators' capacity to meet their own needs and those of their students in ways that are convenient and cost effective.

- SEAs are increasingly using learning management systems to centralize, coordinate and automate the development, access and administration of professional learning content.

- All states in the study have adopted at least one policy to give districts or schools flexibility from state laws or regulations, that they can use to pursue innovative approaches to professional learning, for example, charter schools and innovation zones. Research has revealed scant and uneven evidence that the implementation of such policies has improved professional learning, teacher effectiveness or student achievement. However, where achievement gains were found, adults were engaged in robust professional learning and state and district leaders monitored local practice and held local leaders accountable for results.

Strong state efforts

West Virginia has undertaken strong efforts in this area, including the following actions.

- Extensive online, on-demand digital archives of professional learning resources.

- Policies that allow schools or districts to seek flexibilities from state laws or policies, that they may use to pursue innovative approaches to professional learning.

- A high-priority, statewide initiative focused specifically on increasing local flexibility for the purpose of enhancing professional learning.

Funding

Trends in state efforts

- States have used multiple sources of funding to support professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards. However, these funds have shifted over time, hampering efforts to commit to educator development over the long term.

- SEA leaders in four states deployed temporary grant funding strategically and prioritized programs in order to sustain key professional learning initiatives when the grant funding ended. One state used existing funds strategically by reorganizing SEA staff and intensifying cross-organizational collaboration to provide districts with sustained professional learning on the state college- and career-readiness standards.

3 Offer professional learning

Trends in state efforts

- In all states, the SEA has offered, either itself or in collaboration with regional centers or other partners, at least some professional learning on the state college- and career-readiness standards. Many of the offerings have been stand-alone sessions or short series of sessions.

- In two states, the SEA has offered extensive learning opportunities to *individual educators*, reaching large numbers of teachers and school and district leaders.

- In five states, the SEA has offered extensive learning opportunities to local *leadership teams*, helping participants build their own knowledge and skills to implement the standards and their collective capacity to lead high-quality professional learning at their local sites.

- Three states have provided extensive, tailored professional learning for *school and district leaders*.

- All of the states reported increasing their use of *online and blended learning* formats in order to reach more educators, more efficiently.

Strong state efforts

Six states have undertaken strong efforts in this area — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee — including the following actions.

- Offering numerous opportunities for individual teachers and school and district leaders to develop their understanding of and skills to implement the standards.

- Providing extensive, long-term learning opportunities for local *leadership teams* including teachers and school and district leaders, reaching a substantial number of — if not all — districts or schools. This work with teams helps to build deep and broad expertise to implement the standards and provide high-quality professional learning for all educators.

4 Use data and accountability for continuous improvement

Trends in state efforts — use of data

- Four states have implemented multi-layered structures and systemic processes to make extensive use of data across the SEA and with educators and partners.

- Six states have regularly collected data on local practice through frequent consultation with local leaders and on-site monitoring visits.

- In five states, the SEA has gone further than in other states to ensure that leaders have sufficient data to determine where and how to make improvements along the way in professional learning and to assess whether initiatives are worthy of funding, time and effort. In these states, the SEA has recently published or commissioned evaluations of state programs, examining the impacts of program activities on teacher knowledge and practice and student outcomes.

Trends in state efforts — feedback and accountability

- The depth of feedback given to school and district leaders on local professional learning has varied greatly across the states.

- In five states the SEA has provided regular, in-depth feedback to local leaders as part of a seamless cycle of collaboration that integrates professional learning, technical assistance and feedback.

- Few state leaders have the tools and authority they need to demand accountability for high-quality, effective professional learning statewide. Few states gather consistent data on local professional learning practices, and responsibility to improve local professional learning largely rests with schools and districts, many of which lack sufficient resources and expertise to do so.

Strong state efforts

Four states have undertaken strong efforts in this area — Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee — including the following actions.

- Implementing clear structures and routines involving multiple levels of leadership across divisions in the SEA and including input from partners and educators, to regularly analyze data to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of state professional learning efforts.

- Using comprehensive program evaluations that examine the impacts of professional learning on teacher and student outcomes, to understand and improve state initiatives.

- Providing feedback to local leaders on their efforts, through multiple channels.

- Providing monitoring, support and improvement directives to schools and districts in need of improvement, as part of the interventions they undergo. Otherwise, the responsibility to demand accountability and drive actions to improve local professional learning rests with schools and districts.

Moving forward

Six key state actions to strengthen state leadership and support for professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards

1. **Foster more data-based decision-making about professional learning and strengthen shared accountability for excellence at the state and local levels.**

   - *Systematically monitor the quality and implementation of state professional learning* efforts in order to make adjustments along the way and address emerging needs.

   - *Rigorously examine measureable outcomes of state professional learning,* including whether educators found it useful and relevant and whether it impacted teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes.

   - *Support enhanced monitoring and evaluation of professional learning at the local level* through guidance, tools and assistance to school and district leaders.

   - *Strengthen shared accountability for excellence.*

     - Increase feedback channels within the SEA's professional learning programs and technical assistance services, so the SEA can gather more data and provide timely feedback to local leaders on their efforts.

     - Require the inclusion of findings from robust implementation monitoring and rigorous program evaluations of local professional learning in state reporting structures, such as school and district improvement plans, funding applications, and program reports.

2. **Integrate the use of guidance and tools, technical assistance, professional learning and feedback in a seamless cycle of collaboration to foster continual improvement.**

   - This provides multiple points at which educators can engage with new knowledge, implement their learning and reflect on their practice — increasing the chance that new learning will change teaching and impact student achievement.

3. **Enhance the use of technology in professional learning.**

   - Update the state's digital, on-demand resources continually to enhance the amount, reach, relevance and efficiency of state support for educator learning. As new technologies emerge, SEAs should keep pace by using them strategically in their programs to support educator development. In doing so, SEAs can enhance their services and also provide local leaders with models for using technology effectively to improve educator and student learning.

4. **Provide ongoing professional learning for educators to address statewide needs and fill local gaps.**

   - *Teachers* need to deepen their understanding of the standards, effective instructional strategies, analysis of data to guide instruction, and the use of online instruction and assessment formats. They need time to collaborate, practice what they learn, and receive feedback.

   - *School and district leaders* need to better understand the standards and effective instructional strategies, and how to provide actionable feedback to teachers. They need support for improving the professional learning they offer locally so that it meets the state's standards for professional learning.

5. **Focus on equity and excellence for all students.**

   - Offer more guidance and tools as well as professional learning to help *all* educators learn about differentiating instruction, especially for English learners and students with disabilities, so that schools can better serve their increasingly diverse student bodies.

6. **Devote resources strategically to professional learning.**

   - Use data to identify the biggest needs and gaps in the professional learning of educators statewide to target state support where it is needed the most.

   - Work with stakeholders, including educators, legislators, regional education centers, universities, and trusted partners such as external funders and national expert organizations to target resources for professional learning. Resources could include funding, time, technology, local and cross-state partnerships, staff positions and expertise, and other support.

   - Strategically leverage resources and design initiatives creatively so that the efforts can be sustained over time.
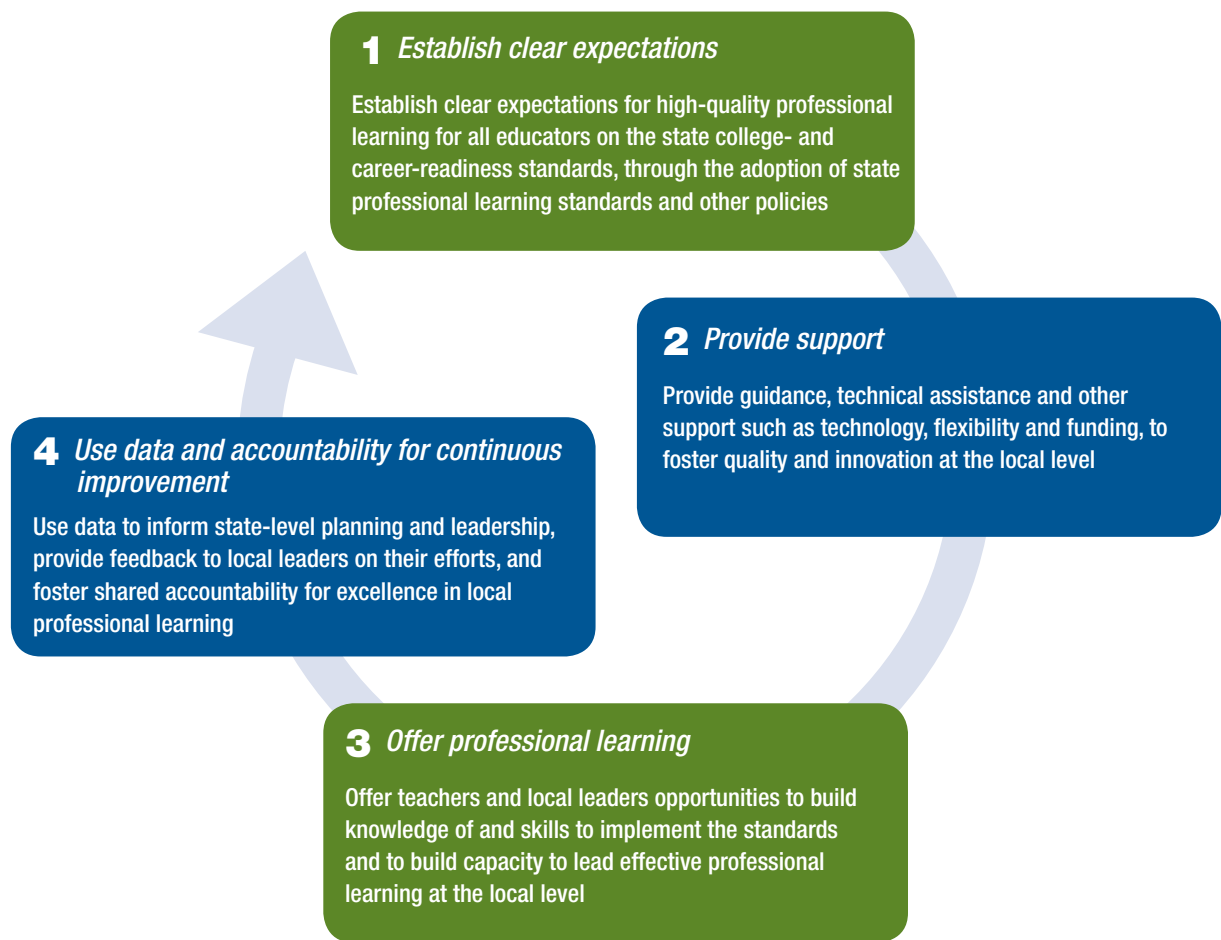
Introduction

Since 2010, every state in the nation has embarked on reforms that challenge business-as-usual in public education. Perhaps the most high-profile of these reforms is the adoption of new, more rigorous standards in English language arts and math, aimed at preparing students for opportunities in postsecondary studies and careers. These standards, generally referred to as college- and career-readiness standards, require that students learn more challenging content and that teachers employ new teaching techniques to help students do so.

Trends on national college- and career-readiness assessments confirm that much work needs to be done to achieve the goal of college and career readiness for all. According to ACT, in 2015 approximately 59 percent of the nation's graduating class took the ACT exam. Just 40 percent of these students met three or four of the exam's four subject area college-readiness benchmarks. More than 30 percent of these students did not meet any of the benchmarks. These benchmarks have a high probability of accuracy in predicting whether students will be successful in credit-bearing college courses. To meet the challenge of getting more students ready for college and careers, states increasingly need all educators to be experts in standards and aligned instruction so that all students have more opportunities to prepare themselves for success after graduation.

State education agencies (SEA), districts, schools and educators have used professional learning, also often referred to as professional development, as a primary resource to build teacher knowledge and skills. The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, continues to stress the importance of professional development as a strategy for increasing educator effectiveness to help students master high academic standards.

To support states, SREB worked with education leaders in SREB states and national experts to identify four areas of work through which states can foster high-quality professional learning for all educators on state college- and career-readiness standards.

Four Areas of State Work to Foster High-Quality Professional Learning for All Educators on State College- and Career-Readiness Standards

1 *Establish clear expectations*

Establish clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on the state college- and career-readiness standards, through the adoption of state professional learning standards and other policies

2 *Provide support*

Provide guidance, technical assistance and other support such as technology, flexibility and funding, to foster quality and innovation at the local level

4 *Use data and accountability for continuous improvement*

Use data to inform state-level planning and leadership, provide feedback to local leaders on their efforts, and foster shared accountability for excellence in local professional learning

3 *Offer professional learning*

Offer teachers and local leaders opportunities to build knowledge of and skills to implement the standards and to build capacity to lead effective professional learning at the local level

These areas reflect key actions SEAs take as part of their work in implementing policies, providing support and assistance to local districts and schools, ensuring that districts and schools abide by statutory and policy requirements, and assuring the quality of services provided to the public and a return on the investment of education dollars. The areas also reflect how SEAs are uniquely positioned to inspire, incentivize, support and drive efforts in professional learning statewide. Taken together, the four areas of work represent a cycle of interrelated activities that state leaders can undertake to foster continuous improvement in professional learning at the state and local levels.

For each of the four areas, SREB developed a set of expected actions — look-fors — for state leaders to take that fulfill their leadership in the area. Through Internet research and interviews with state education leaders and educators, **SREB gathered data on efforts in 15 states in each of the areas in 2014-15 and 2015-16.** The look-fors guided SREB's assessment of efforts in each state and across states. **See the appendix for a full description of the look-fors, a list of participating states, an overview of the project and the methodology used to develop the findings below.** Access all the state profiles on the project Web page for a description of each state's efforts.

Findings

Area 1 Establish Clear Expectations

Establish clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on the state college- and career-readiness standards

Overview

Effective leaders recognize that their first key task in leading professional learning is to establish clear, shared expectations for the content, quality and effectiveness of the learning opportunities available to educators across the state.

1 *Establish clear expectations*

2 *Provide support*

3 *Offer professional learning*

4 *Use data and accountability*

States provide leadership in this area by

- Adopting state standards for professional learning.

- Providing additional policy supports to assist districts, schools and other providers in implementing the standards for professional learning, such as a statewide definition of professional learning and requirements for local professional learning systems.

Read more in the appendix about the <u>look-fors</u> that SREB used to assess state efforts.

State standards for professional learning and related policy supports provide the SEA, districts, schools, educators, vendors and providers with clear expectations for excellence in the development, design, delivery and evaluation of professional learning. These standards and policies should incorporate findings from research about the elements of educator learning and development that make it meaningful and high quality. According to Linda Darling-Hammond and other experts at the Stanford School Redesign Network, more than a decade of research has established a consensus that high-quality learning for educators is:

- job-embedded, so that it is part of their everyday work;

- sustained over time, and not a one-time event;

- focused on core content, in this case, on college- and career-readiness standards and related instructional strategies;

- connected to specific improvement goals, for educators as well as students;

- flexible in format, recognizing that one size does not fit all; and

- interactive, with opportunities for coaching, modeling and feedback.

In 2011, Learning Forward (previously the National Staff Development Council) released its model <u>standards for professional learning</u>. These standards outline expectations for what has been called *professional development*, *staff development* or *in-service training*. These standards outline an approach to professional *learning* that is different from professional *development* in several key ways. For example, professional learning:

- Incorporates elements of research-based, high-quality learning for educators.

- Involves educators as active participants in and leaders of their own learning, rather than as passive recipients.

- Aligns the learning goals of students, educators, schools, districts and states.

- Evaluates the impact of adult learning on both adult practice and student achievement through the use of multiple sources of data.

- Recognizes the role of adult learning as part of a comprehensive continuous improvement cycle and dedicates sufficient resources to support that learning.

The Learning Forward standards have been adopted by 38 states and are widely accepted as rigorous, research-based, comprehensive, and outcomes-oriented for educators and students. Because this work has been widely accepted, SREB has adopted the term *professional learning*, but also occasionally uses *professional development* to reflect the continuing use of the more familiar term in some states and in federal law.

Trends in state efforts: *Establish clear expectations*

State leaders have increasingly grounded their leadership of professional learning on updated standards for professional learning. These standards set expectations of excellence for practitioners and professional learning providers and serve as the basis for holding the state, districts, schools, vendors and providers accountable for delivering high-quality learning experiences to meet the needs of educators and students.

Eight of the 15 SREB states in the study have recently adopted Learning Forward's 2011 standards for professional learning. Six of the states have adopted other standards for professional learning, mostly state-developed. In three of these states, however, the SEA has recommended that districts use the Learning Forward standards to guide district work. One SREB state has not adopted professional learning standards, although its state law establishes some requirements for professional development.

Establish clear expectations

Key points

- State leaders have increasingly grounded their leadership of professional learning on updated standards for professional learning.

- These standards set expectations of excellence for practitioners and professional learning providers and serve as the basis for holding the state, districts, schools, vendors and providers accountable for delivering high-quality learning experiences to meet the needs of educators and students.

Moving forward

- After adopting state standards for professional learning, more states should consider providing guidance, structures or reforms to help districts, schools, educators and providers implement them, for example, through

  - supplementary policies or guidance, such as a statewide definition of professional learning;

  - requirements or recommendations to help districts strengthen their practice, such as requiring that districts have a professional development coordinator; and

  - a statewide initiative to support systemic reform to improve professional learning.

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Six states have **established additional policies** to support implementation of the state professional learning standards. Alabama, Kentucky and West Virginia adopted statewide definitions of professional learning, to establish shared understanding of practices that meet the quality indicators articulated in the standards for professional learning. Arkansas adopted Rules Governing Professional Development. Georgia established Georgia School Performance Standards and Georgia District Performance Standards, which include standards on professional learning. Mississippi established Public School Accountability Standards that require districts to implement a professional development program aligned with the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning.

Two states, Florida and Kentucky, have **set specific requirements for district professional learning systems**, requiring that districts have a professional development director or coordinator dedicated to ensuring that local efforts are high quality and meet state expectations.

Two states currently have major initiatives focused on enhancing professional learning to support implementation of the state's college- and career-readiness standards. See the highlights below for descriptions of the initiatives in Kentucky and West Virginia.

Strong state efforts

Overall, seven states have undertaken strong efforts in this area: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi and West Virginia. These states have gone beyond adopting state standards for professional learning to establish additional policies to assist districts and schools in implementing the standards. These additional policies, such as a statewide definition of professional learning and requirements for local professional learning systems, foster quality and consistency of practice statewide. Further, Kentucky and West Virginia launched major statewide initiatives focused on enhancing professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards.

> *Highlights*
>
> **Kentucky** began systemic reform of professional learning in 2009 in response to legislation. Guided by a professional learning task force, education leaders in Kentucky worked with Learning Forward, external funders and other partners, including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. Six peer states, including Georgia, served as critical friends, providing feedback and ideas to the Kentucky team as it developed its plans. Kentucky developed a comprehensive system of professional learning; it also adopted Learning Forward's standards for professional learning.
>
> Since 2010-11, all districts in Kentucky have established a leadership team. Team members participate over a three-year period in monthly role-specific, face-to-face leadership network meetings and ongoing follow-up sessions. They also receive regular technical assistance and support for sharing their new learning about teaching the Kentucky Academic Standards and implementing high-quality professional development with colleagues in their schools and districts. From 2010-11 through 2012-13, the networks focused on English language arts and math. In 2011-12 through 2013-14, the networks focused on early childhood. Since 2013-14, the networks have focused on science and social studies. Though trained English language arts and math teachers have cycled out of participation in the networks, the SEA expects them to continue to support professional learning efforts in their schools

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and districts. In 2014, the state board of education revised its regulation on professional development, establishing a statewide definition of professional learning, and required districts to designate a professional development coordinator to ensure implementation fidelity.

Kentucky's statewide definition of professional learning: *"Professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to increase student achievement that strengthens and improves educators' effectiveness in meeting individual, team, school, school district, and state goals. It is ongoing, relevant, job-embedded learning for educators at all stages of career development."*

West Virginia adopted Learning Forward's standards for professional learning, and in 2012 the state board of education adopted a statewide definition: *"Professional learning includes sustained experiences that lead to the development of knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions educators need to help students perform at higher levels and achieve college and career readiness."* In response to the standards, definition and Senate Bill 359 of 2013, the SEA developed the Transforming Professional Learning initiative in collaboration with the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Learning Forward, and a stakeholder advisory group. The initiative launched in 2015-16, with funding from the Benedum Foundation, as part of West Virginia's annual comprehensive Master Plan for Statewide Professional Development. This initiative shifts West Virginia from a centralized system of professional development based on large-scale institutes provided by the SEA and external partners, to a school-based model of continual learning. Educators collaboratively determine their learning needs based on data and the SEA, regional education service agencies and other partners provide support to school- and district-based professional learning communities.

Area 2 Provide Support

Provide guidance, technical assistance and other support for local efforts

Overview

By providing guidance, assistance and other types of support, state leaders help districts and schools strengthen their efforts to provide high-quality professional learning for all educators on state college- and career-readiness standards. SEAs are uniquely placed both to offer general support for all districts and to provide targeted support to build capacity where needed. As such, SEAs foster consistency in the quality and effectiveness of professional learning statewide.

1 *Establish clear expectations*

2 *Provide support*

4 *Use data and accountability*

3 *Offer professional learning*

States fulfill this area of leadership by providing

A. Guidance and tools to help local leaders learn about, design, implement and evaluate professional learning that meets the needs of educators and students.

B. Technical assistance to districts and schools to support their efforts to design, implement and evaluate professional learning.

C. Other support for professional learning, such as technology, flexibility to foster local innovation, and funding.

Read more in the appendix about the <u>look-fors</u> that SREB used to assess state efforts.

Trends in state efforts: *Provide guidance, technical assistance and other support*

A. Trends in state efforts: *Guidance and tools*

All of the states have offered local educators and leaders general guidance and tools on professional learning to support school and district improvement, such as school improvement planning templates. Ten states offer additional **in-depth guidance and tools on professional learning specifically for the state college- and career-readiness standards**, such as implementation rubrics and manuals. Of these 10 states, the guidance and tools in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky and Maryland are the most extensive.

All states offer some sample training materials, informational videos and online courses that

Guidance and tools

Key points

- All of the states have provided at least general guidance, resources and tools on professional learning to support school and district improvement.

- Ten states have provided additional in-depth guidance and tools on professional learning specifically for the state college- and career-readiness standards, such as implementation rubrics and manuals.

Moving forward

- All of the states can enhance the support they provide for districts, schools and educators by offering more tools and support for

  - local monitoring and evaluation of professional learning,

  - helping teachers learn about differentiating instruction for diverse learners, and

  - local induction and mentoring programs for new practitioners.

local leaders and educators can use in their learning activities. Five states — Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana and Tennessee — also provide **sets of sample materials designed for comprehensive, coordinated professional learning programs**. These materials can serve both as items for immediate use to support coordinated learning activities and as models to inform the local development of comprehensive programs.

While **state online repositories** of professional learning resources continue to grow and mature, SREB's researchers found that all of the state repositories include more resources, materials and tools for the stages of planning, designing and delivering professional learning, and less on monitoring implementation and evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning. This leaves **a gap in support for local leaders as they undertake the important and challenging tasks of tracking the quality of their efforts and assessing whether those efforts produced the desired results**.

State repositories also provide **relatively few tools, resources, and materials on the increasingly important topic of differentiating instruction and assessment for diverse learners**. Across the nation, the need to focus on equity and excellence for all students continues. Gaps in achievement persist between students from racial and ethnic groups and their white peers — and between English learners, students with disabilities and students from low-income households, and their respective classmates. These gaps become more worrisome as the proportion of public school students nationwide becomes more diverse and includes more students from families living in poverty — with this trend even more pronounced in SREB states. In recent polls such as that conducted by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, educators nationwide have said that they feel underprepared to implement their state's college- and career-readiness standards with their diverse students. Several of this study's interviewees in SREB states noted that educators struggle to help their neediest students. Federal law continues to demand that state accountability systems address achievement for all students. According to ESSA, by 2017-18 states must implement accountability systems to identify schools with persistently underperforming subgroups and intervene where needed to help the schools improve teacher practice and student achievement. State leaders have an opportunity to help schools, districts and teachers strengthen teaching and learning for all of their students by expanding the number of tools, resources, and materials the state offers on this topic.

Induction and mentoring programs provide timely opportunities for new practitioners to learn how to implement their state's college- and career-readiness standards and receive feedback on their practice. Studies from Glazerman and colleagues and Villar and Strong document that comprehensive, high-quality induction and mentoring programs can accelerate the professional growth of beginning teachers, enhance student learning and reduce the rate of new teacher attrition. Helping new practitioners becomes even more important in light of the findings of the National Council on Teacher Quality's 2013 review of teacher preparation programs in American colleges and universities, which examined programs in 1,130 institutions that prepared 99 percent of the nation's traditionally trained new teachers. Researchers found that fewer than one in nine elementary programs and just over one-third of high school programs prepared candidates in content at the level necessary to teach to states' college- and career-readiness standards. With so many teachers arriving at the classroom with less than optimal preparation, induction and mentoring programs can play a critical role in helping them gain needed knowledge and skills as fast as possible on the job.

Twelve of the states in this study require induction or mentoring programs for new teachers, and six require such programs for new principals or local superintendents. In most states, districts provide these programs — some in partnership with higher education institutions. State leaders are therefore uniquely situated to provide guidance and support to build shared knowledge and foster consistency in the content

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and quality of services offered to participants statewide. In all except one state, the SEA has provided some guidance or support for local programs. Alabama, North Carolina and Maryland have provided the most extensive support, and in Alabama, Arkansas and Maryland the SEA helps monitor or evaluate local programs.

Strong state efforts

Overall, eight states have undertaken strong efforts in providing guidance and tools: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and Tennessee. These states have gone beyond offering general guidance and tools for school improvement, to offer in-depth guidance, tools and rubrics for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards. These states also offer extensive online, on-demand resources for professional learning that include sets of materials designed for comprehensive professional learning programs — materials that can serve both as items for immediate use in local activities and as models to support the local development of comprehensive programs.

Highlights

The **Florida** SEA provides <u>checklists</u> to support implementation of the state professional development standards at the district, school and educator levels. It also provides <u>online modules and a technical assistance guide</u> on planning, implementing and evaluating professional development. The SEA's <u>Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol</u> establishes criteria for exemplary professional development practices at the district, school and educator levels. The SEA uses the protocol to conduct site reviews of the professional development systems in the state's 75 districts, on a four-year cycle. District and school leaders can also use the protocol when needed to assess the quality of their own efforts and identify emerging needs. On its <u>CPALMS</u> (Collaborate Plan Align Learn Motivate Share) website, <u>iCPALMS</u> platform and the <u>Florida School Leaders website</u>, the SEA provides additional, extensive guidance and tools that educators can access on-demand. These include professional learning exemplars, online courses, videos of exemplary instruction, instructional planning tools, including supports for differentiating instruction, and resources for district professional development directors. The SEA also offers online, on-demand guidance and resources for local coaching and mentoring programs for new teachers.

In **Louisiana,** the <u>Louisiana Principals' Teaching & Learning Guidebook</u> provides extensive guidance to principals as they build a team to lead implementation of the state's college- and career-readiness standards and plan, implement and evaluate professional learning. The <u>Louisiana District Planning Guide</u> provides extensive guidance to district leaders on implementing the standards and providing professional learning for educators. The SEA's <u>District + School Support Toolbox</u> and <u>Teacher Support Toolbox</u> provide extensive sets of online, on-demand tools and exemplars for educators, including sets of materials from the SEA's teacher leaders and district support network professional learning programs and quarterly supervisor collaboration meetings. The SEA also offers data reflection guides for districts and principals to support the use of local data in decision-making and planning.

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B. Trends in state efforts: *Technical assistance*

In each of the states, the SEA has focused its most intensive technical assistance efforts on schools in need of improvement and their districts. Much of this assistance has been provided by the SEA itself, but has often been offered in collaboration with regional education centers or other partners, as well. Typical services have included feedback on improvement plans, support for data analysis to identify professional learning needs, coaching and planning advice, and monitoring the progress of improvement efforts.

In most states, the SEA or regional education centers have also offered some assistance to all districts. However, SEA interviewees in several states reported that the type and degree of assistance delivered to districts varied widely depending on a variety of factors, including differences in regional center capacity and local participation.

Six states — Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina — have **provided intensive, regular technical assistance to leadership teams in a large number of — and in some cases, *all* — districts or schools.** Local leadership teams in these states have received regular support to help them implement high-quality professional learning for their educators. Additionally, the SEA, and in some cases regional center staff and other partners, have provided targeted assistance to teacher leaders and district directors of curriculum and professional development, in order to build expertise where needed across the state.

The work of five states **to integrate technical assistance with professional learning is notable:** in Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina, the SEA designed its flagship professional learning program for the state

Technical assistance

Key points

- In each of the states, the SEA has focused its technical assistance efforts on schools in need of improvement and their districts.

- In most states, the SEA or regional education centers have also offered some assistance to all districts. However, the type and degree of assistance delivered has varied widely.

- Six states have provided intensive, regular technical assistance to leadership teams in a large number of — and in some cases, *all* — their districts or schools.

- Five states have integrated technical assistance into the SEA's professional learning program — increasing the chances that participants' learning will change practice and improve student learning.

Moving forward

- State leaders should consider how to ensure that local leaders get the help they need — for example, by

  - developing the capacity of regional centers and other partners to provide exemplary support, and

  - modifying the SEA's services to address the most pressing gaps in assistance for schools and districts.

- State leaders should consider how they might further integrate technical assistance and professional learning — to increase the chances that the professional learning the SEA offers will change practice and improve student learning.

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college- and career-readiness standards to weave regular, structured technical assistance activities into the schedule of ongoing learning events. For example, in Louisiana, the agency provides support sessions for planning teams from all 131 districts in the state as part of its District Support Network quarterly professional learning events. It also hosts regular webinars, shares weekly newsletters and hosts monthly conference calls with district leaders to share updates, address implementation challenges and provide support. In Kentucky, the SEA's Leadership Networks provide structured, regular assistance to leadership teams from all 173 districts to complement the monthly professional learning provided to the teams. The agency's 16 regional instructional specialists partner with Kentucky's regional educational cooperatives to offer further support for schools and districts as they design and implement professional learning locally. **This joining of professional learning and technical assistance has enhanced the support local educators receive for implementing their new learning — increasing the chances that the SEA's professional learning will impact classroom practice and improve student learning.**

Strong state efforts

The six states with strong efforts in technical assistance are Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina. These states have done more than just provide feedback to districts on school improvement or professional learning plans, provide intensive assistance to schools in need of improvement and offer at least some services to districts statewide. These states have worked intensively and regularly with leadership teams in a large number of — and in some cases, *all* — districts or schools to build their capacity to provide high-quality professional learning for their educators. Additionally, teacher leaders and district directors of curriculum and professional development have received targeted support to build local expertise.

Highlights

In **Delaware**, the SEA integrated technical assistance into its Common Ground for the Common Core professional learning initiative. Throughout the school year, SEA staff members meet with school and district leadership teams through face-to-face training sessions, school-based planning clinics, feedback sessions and virtual coaching. During these meetings, teams receive assistance with planning, implementing and monitoring the professional learning they deliver in their schools and districts based on their learning from the Common Ground for the Common Core trainings. Since 2013-14, 136 of the state's 225 schools, representing 18 of 19 districts, have participated, with 100 schools in 2013-14, 80 in 2014-15 and 40 in 2015-16. Additionally, the SEA conducts annual Common Core site visits to one school in every district. Using the Progress and Capacity Site Visit Rubric, SEA staff members assess progress on Common Core implementation and professional learning. They base their assessments of progress on data gathered from documents, classroom observations, interviews with educators and focus groups with students and parents. After the visit, the SEA provides local leaders with a report of findings and recommendations. Further, SEA staff members meet monthly with district English language arts and math content specialists, and directors of instruction and assessment from all districts to promote collaborative planning and resource development.

In **Maryland**, the state superintendent meets monthly with all 24 district superintendents, and SEA staff members meet monthly with district assistant superintendents and curriculum content supervisors — and quarterly with other district leaders. Through these meetings, district leaders receive role-specific information and support for their implementation of the Maryland College and

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Career-Ready Standards and professional learning. Additionally, since 2013-14, the SEA has conducted support visits to districts, visiting all of the state's 24 districts in 2013-14 and conducting follow-up visits upon district request in 2014-15 and 2015-16. During the visits, SEA staff members review data, meet with district and school leaders and teachers, and observe in classrooms, to assess local implementation of the standards. Based on findings, the SEA provides individualized assistance to district leaders.

C. Trends in state efforts: *Other support, such as technology, flexibility for innovation, and funding*

Technology

All states in the study provide, at a minimum, a basic online archive of professional learning resources that educators can access on demand to meet their needs. **The online resource repositories have generally grown during 2014-15 and 2015-16**, with SEAs adding new resources and updating existing ones. SEA staff interviewed shared that offering resources online yields several benefits: it increases the reach and impact of state offerings by enabling educators to access them easily to meet their own needs; it provides a cost-effective way for the state to provide support; and it provides resources free of cost to educators. It also makes the SEA's work of updating and adding resources relatively quick and easy.

In seven of the states, the SEA has also employed a learning management system as part of its suite of technology supports for professional learning, with four of the states either launching or updating their system in 2014-15 or 2015-16: Delaware, Florida, North Carolina and West Virginia. While these learning management systems vary in design and function, they all give states the capacity to centralize online materials, simplify and coordinate their distribution, and streamline their development. Educators can use these systems to register for events, communicate with each other about their learning, and select content to support their learning. Districts and schools can use them to coordinate planning and monitoring processes and share best practices. Some learning management systems enable SEAs to track and report on trends in educator use of state-provided resources and educator participation in state-offered learning activities. Some systems also enable states to integrate professional learning content and data with other agency data systems, for example, linking educator evaluation data and student achievement data to identify personalized content for educator growth and development.

Technology

Key points

- SEAs have expanded their digital repositories of on-demand professional learning guidance, resources and tools. These repositories increase educators' capacity to meet their own needs and those of their students in a way that is convenient and cost-effective.

- SEAs have increasingly used learning management systems to centralize, coordinate and automate the development, access, and administration of professional learning content.

Moving forward

- States can enhance support for the effective use of technology in school and district professional learning by

  - keeping the online guidance, resources and tools the SEA offers current and relevant;

  - exploring the use of efficiency-enhancing technology such as learning management systems; and

  - modelling the use of technology in SEA professional learning.

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Flexibility for innovation

All states in this study have adopted at least one **policy to give districts or schools opportunities for flexibility from state laws or regulations, that they can use to pursue innovative approaches to professional learning**. Thirteen of the states studied allow for the authorization of charter schools. These independently run public schools are granted flexibility in operations based on waivers of certain state laws, rules or guidelines. In exchange for this flexibility, charter schools are held accountable for meeting student performance targets. One state, Georgia, also has **charter systems**, entire districts that operate under the terms of a charter granted by the state board.

In five states, schools or districts may apply to be granted **innovation status**, called innovation zones in Alabama and West Virginia, schools of innovation in Arkansas, and districts of innovation in Kentucky and Mississippi. Like charter schools, districts or schools with innovation status receive approval to waive certain state requirements in order to implement agreed-upon flexibilities. Six states have other, similar policies: Arkansas's district waivers; Florida's Deregulated Public Schools Act autonomy waivers; North Carolina's school improvement waivers; Tennessee's schoolwide consolidated pilot program; Virginia's flexible scheduling planning grants; and West Virginia's Reimagined Time pilot program, which encourages flexible approaches to local school day and school year calendars. West Virginia's pilot forms part of the state's **comprehensive statewide initiative**, Transforming Professional Learning, which launched in 2015-16 to increase flexibility for local districts and schools to expand and enhance professional learning.

Flexibility for innovation

Key points

- All states in the study have adopted at least one policy to give districts or schools flexibility from state laws or regulations that they can use to pursue innovative approaches to professional learning, for example, charter schools and innovation zones.

- Research has revealed scant and uneven evidence that the implementation of such policies has improved professional learning, teacher effectiveness or student achievement. Where achievement gains were found, adults were engaged in robust professional learning and state and district leaders monitored local practice and held local leaders accountable for results.

Moving forward

- States can increase the chances that their policies on local flexibility will lead to changes in educator development, teaching and learning by

  - focusing on how these policies could be used specifically to enhance professional learning, and supporting local leaders in implementing those approaches;

  - monitoring implementation; and

  - holding local leaders accountable for measurable results.

Area 4 of this report takes a deeper look at the issue of using data and evaluation for continuous improvement.

These flexibility policies provide an opportunity for schools and districts to experiment with innovative approaches to professional learning, and they reflect an increased focus nationally on flexibility and local autonomous decision-making as a policy lever. However, **to date, research has revealed scant and uneven evidence that the implementation of such policies has improved professional learning, teacher effectiveness or student achievement.** In 2006 the National Resource Center on Charter School Finance

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and Governance reported that a movement in charter schools across the country to develop in-house teacher training programs has attracted more — and more diverse — candidates for teaching positions, but the authors were not able to cite associated gains in student or teacher performance. In a 2015 national review of state policies and practices granting local flexibility and autonomy, James Lieberman and colleagues found little evidence that the policies had resulted in improved student achievement. **However, where achievement gains were found, research had shown that in addition to local autonomy and flexibility, two other key elements were in place**: adults were engaged in robust professional learning, regularly collaborating to analyze data, learn and problem solve; and state and district leaders monitored local practice and held local leaders accountable for results.

A persistent question about how to use professional learning in general, and how to best employ local flexibility specifically, to improve teaching and learning is *how much* **time should educators spend engaged in learning?** Studies such as a comprehensive review of research by Guskey and Yoon in 2009 and a 2016 study by Kane and colleagues have established that overall, professional learning programs of greater intensity and duration have been more positively associated with teacher growth and student learning gains than programs of shorter duration and intensity. And an international comparative study in 2016 conducted by Ben Jensen and colleagues found that in the highest-performing countries — ones that outperformed the United States on international assessments — schools allocated significantly more time in teachers' regular work week for collaboration and study. However, exactly *how much* time is needed to produce measureable improvement is not a settled question. Guskey and Yoon noted that while some studies have suggested that initiatives require a minimum of 30 contact hours to show positive effects, the number has varied from study to study. TNTP's 2015 study of three large U.S. districts looked at trends in teacher effectiveness on multiple measures over two to four years and found that no particular amount of time spent on professional development was linked to substantial improvement in teacher effectiveness.

Leaders in SREB states can take **three steps to increase the chances that their policies on local flexibility will lead to measurable changes in teaching and learning**:

- **Focus on how the policies could be used *specifically* to increase time for and enhance professional learning, and support local leaders in experimenting with those approaches.**

- **Systematically monitor implementation of those approaches.**

- **Hold local leaders accountable for providing measurable results.**

Area 4 of this report takes a deeper look at the issue of using data and evaluation to drive continuous improvement.

Strong state efforts

Overall, one state — West Virginia — has undertaken a strong effort to provide support such as technology and flexibility for innovation. This state provides educators with extensive online, on-demand access to professional learning resources and provides districts and schools with opportunities to seek flexibility from state laws or policies to improve professional learning. The state has also launched a high-priority, statewide initiative focused specifically on increasing local flexibility for the purpose of enhancing professional learning.

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Highlights

In **West Virginia**, state law and a new state initiative *encourage flexibility* for schools. According to state law, schools or groups of schools can apply for innovation zone status to waive certain policies, rules and statutory constraints in order to increase and enhance professional learning. The SEA offers local leaders ideas for using this flexibility effectively. Additionally, the SEA launched two pilot programs as part of its Transforming Professional Learning initiative. In 2014-15, five schools volunteered as Catalyst Schools to pilot approaches to maximizing time in the school day and year for professional learning, and received support from the state's regional education service agencies; in 2015-16, 25 more schools volunteered. Through the state's Reimagined Time initiative, beginning in 2016-17 districts can apply to the state board of education to implement flexible school year and school day calendars in order to increase educator collaboration and professional learning time. In 2015-16 the SEA is providing information and support to districts interested in participating through quarterly meetings and webinars. The SEA tracks implementation of these pilot programs as part of its annual evaluation of the Master Plan for Statewide Professional Development, and based on lessons learned, the SEA plans to expand this approach to all schools in the state.

The **North Carolina** SEA provides strong *technology supports* for professional learning. The SEA's extensive repositories of online, on-demand resources house iTunes U courses and LEAD Ed webinars and courses, and include LiveBinders and Wiki spaces, which enable educators to access and share resources specific to the needs of content areas, grade levels and students. The SEA also provides learning management systems, including Home Base, which allows educators to access personalized learning content based on their evaluation results, and Canvas, which houses learning resources for educators and students.

Funding

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, states have used **multiple sources of funding for professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards**. All states reported using general state education funds, and nine states reported special allocations of state funds. Most of these allocations funded particular activities or programs; a few were to fund staff positions such as regional content specialists or coaches to provide teachers with training and support; two were to fund technology projects for professional learning. In addition to general federal funds (for example, Title I), all states except Oklahoma reported using at least one federal grant, such as a State Personnel Development Grant, Mathematics and Science Partnerships, School Improvement Grant, Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy, or Race to the Top. Six of the states reported receiving grants from external partners, including the

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Funding

Key points

- States have used multiple sources of funding to support professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards.

- Funds have shifted over time, hampering efforts to commit to educator development over time.

Moving forward

- State professional learning will more likely reap results for educators and students if states
  - support and dedicate funding to initiatives over the long-term, and
  - design the initiatives strategically to make the most of tight budgets.

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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Helmsley Foundation, the National Governors Association and the Sandler Foundation.

SEA interviewees shared that a major challenge with funding for professional learning is that **the funding sources shift over time, creating unstable revenue streams**. The shifts hinder the ability of SEAs to make long-term commitments to major projects and hamper their efforts to foster deep, continuous professional learning. For example, eight states that received Race to the Top grants used the grants in part to fund professional learning on their state college- and career-readiness standards. When these funds ended, three of the states — Georgia, Maryland and North Carolina — reported having to scale back or significantly change their initiatives. Additionally, school and district leaders reported that even when the SEA offers professional learning opportunities, schools and districts often lack the funds to pay for the substitute teachers and travel expenses needed to send teachers to the trainings.

In 2013, SREB published findings from a <u>study of successful reform in SREB states</u> that found that **sustained funding for professional learning over multiple years has paid off**: SREB examined how five SREB states made notable improvement on the National Assessment of Education Progress in reading and math for fourth- and eighth-graders from 2002 to 2010, and how the states made top gains in the nation on high school graduation rates during the same period. Interviews with state leaders revealed these states followed similar approaches — using the same policy implementation tools — to achieve these gains. Two of the approaches state leaders identified as fundamental to their success were dedicating support, including funding for professional learning for the efforts, and building long-term commitment from stakeholders.

As the need for sustained funding for professional learning also emerged as a key finding in this current study, and as funding is always a limited resource, state leaders should treat funding as a strategic resource — directing it to programs that address the highest priority needs based on data. SEA leaders in Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and Tennessee reported that they identified priorities and deployed available funds strategically so they could sustain key professional learning initiatives when their state's Race to the Top grant ended. They worked with regional education centers to distribute the costs of training, sought other external sources of funding and focused their limited funds on those projects that built educator capacity to teach the state college- and career-readiness standards. In Alabama — which did not receive a Race to the Top grant — in 2012 SEA staff members reorganized efforts to work with directors at the state's regional in-service centers to develop technical assistance plans for all districts. Expert regional staff of the Alabama Reading Initiative and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative, both in place since the late 1990's with sustained support from state funds, began providing much of that assistance to districts. Their support was designed to address local needs and to complement the learning that district leadership teams gain in their quarterly professional learning meetings with the SEA. This approach has allowed districts to experience sustained, comprehensive professional learning and support for their implementation of the standards.

Based on the findings of these two SREB studies, state professional learning will more likely reap results for educators and students if states

• **support and dedicate funding to critical initiatives over the long-term, and**

• **design the initiatives strategically to make the most of tight budgets.**

Area 3 Offer Professional Learning

Offer professional learning that develops educators' understanding of the state standards and educators' skills to implement them – and that builds educators' capacity to lead high-quality professional learning locally

Overview

State-led professional learning provides an important opportunity for educators to learn about state college- and career-readiness standards and how to implement them. By offering professional learning directly to educators, SEAs (themselves or in collaboration with partners) are able to offer activities and programs that foster consistency in the content and quality of learning for educators statewide. State-led professional learning can augment the professional learning provided by districts and schools. In the case of localities with limited expertise, staff or funding — like small rural districts — the SEA may be the major source of expertise and training for educators on the standards. State-provided professional learning can also supply exemplary models for supporting educator development — models that local leaders can draw on as they design their own professional learning systems. The specifics of how SEAs design and deliver professional learning should look different from state to state, based on such factors as geography, number of districts, funding and relationships with regional education centers.

1 *Establish clear expectations*

2 *Provide support*

4 *Use data and accountability*

3 *Offer professional learning*

States fulfill this area of leadership by providing

- Professional learning opportunities for teachers and school and district leaders to

  - help them develop knowledge of and skills to implement the state college- and career-readiness standards, and

  - build their capacity to lead high-quality professional learning for all educators locally.

Read more in the appendix about the <u>look-fors</u> that SREB used to assess state efforts.

Trends in state efforts: *Offer professional learning*

In all of the states studied, in 2014-15 and 2015-16 the SEA has offered (either itself or in collaboration with regional centers or other partners) at least some professional learning to help teachers and school and district leaders learn about and implement state college- and career-readiness standards. Many of the offerings have been stand-alone sessions or series of sessions for individual teachers or district and school leaders, lasting from a few hours to a few days, offered for one or a few years.

Louisiana's Teacher Leader program and Tennessee's summer trainings and leadership courses exemplify an **intensive approach to professional learning for** *individual* **educators**. Significant numbers of educators have participated in these initiatives. In Louisiana, all 1,407 schools in the state may select two or more teachers to participate in the Teacher Leader initiative. The cadre of teacher leaders has grown from 2,000 in 2013-14 to 5,000 in 2015-16, with 10,000 expected in 2016-17. In 2014-15, 70 trained teacher leaders served as teacher leader advisors, helping to facilitate meetings, create tools and vet resources for their fellow teacher leaders; 90 are doing so in 2015-16.

Over 62,000 teachers have participated in Tennessee's summer trainings since 2012, with 12,000 attending in 2015. In collaboration with the state's Centers of Regional Excellence, called CORE, the SEA also offers teachers a series of seven-part courses on reading instruction and intervention, organized by grade band from K-12. Additionally, about 5,000 school and district leaders participated in one or both of Tennessee's basic and advanced leadership courses in 2013 and 2014, and the SEA expects to have served about 2,000 more in 2015 and 2016.

In Louisiana's and Tennessee's initiatives, participants not only build their own expertise but also commit to sharing their knowledge and modelling their skills with peers in their home sites. These programs have been offered for several years, and the SEA in each state has refined them over that time to continually offer participants timely, high-quality experiences.

In five states, SEAs have offered professional learning that exemplifies an **intensive approach to building the capacity of local *leadership teams***. The initiatives in Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina were designed to equip members of school or district leadership teams with knowledge and skills to implement the standards, and to build their collective capacity to lead high-quality professional learning at their local sites. In these states the SEAs have offered comprehensive programs spanning multiple years and providing participants with multiple days of active learning experiences per year. These experiences have included various types of engagement, such as face-to-face institutes, online virtual meetings, and regular collaboration and feedback sessions. In all of the states except Delaware, all districts have participated on a voluntary basis. Such extensive involvement helps build local expertise statewide.

While all of the states have provided some professional learning for school and district leaders, **three states have provided extensive learning opportunities for school and district leaders:** Delaware, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Offer professional learning

Key points

- Louisiana and Tennessee have provided the most extensive opportunities for *individual* educators.

- Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina have provided the most comprehensive opportunities for local leadership *teams*, helping participants build their own knowledge and skills to implement the standards, and their collective capacity to lead high-quality professional learning at their local sites.

- While all of the states have provided some professional learning for *school and district leaders*, Delaware, Kentucky and Tennessee have provided the most extensive offerings.

- All of the states reported increasing their use of *online and blended learning* formats in order to reach more educators, more efficiently.

Moving forward

- All of the states could enhance the professional learning they offer in three ways.

  - Offer ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn about the standards, instruction, assessment and data analysis. Provide time for teachers to collaborate, practice what they learn and receive feedback.

  - Provide more opportunities for school and district leaders to learn about the standards, instruction, assessment, how to provide actionable feedback to teachers and how to improve local professional learning so that it meets the state standards for professional learning.

  - Provide more professional learning to all educators on differentiating instruction and assessment for diverse learners to foster equity and excellence for all students.

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Delaware has provided leader-specific sessions within the SEA's Common Ground for the Common Core training and support sessions for local leadership teams. It has also provided a yearlong program, the Learning Leader Network, to help principals build their capacity to conduct standards-based classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers, and regular content-specific training and assistance for district literacy, math and instructional leaders. Kentucky has provided ongoing study and collaboration opportunities for school and district leaders through three programs: the SEA's Instructional Support Leadership Network, the yearlong LEAD-Kentucky program for principals and district staff, and the yearlong Kentucky Leadership Academy. In Tennessee, the SEA has provided both a basic and an advanced integrated leadership course to build school- and district-level capacity to lead implementation of the standards. School and district leaders also participate in role-specific sessions as part of the summer content area training for teachers.

All of the **SEAs in the states in the study have increased their use of online and blended professional learning formats.** SEA leaders shared in interviews that online and blended delivery mechanisms have helped them sustain and expand their offerings in a time-saving, cost-efficient manner. Educators, in turn, have experienced greater flexibility, variety and cost savings in how and when they access learning content. For example, Georgia's <u>Formative Instructional Practices</u> program provides a series of five online learning modules focused on college- and career-readiness standards-based instruction and assessment, along with face-to-face professional learning community meetings hosted at regional education service agencies or districts. To date, over 42,000 teachers, coaches and school leaders have participated. Louisiana's <u>Teacher Leaders</u> program provides participants with face-to-face learning at annual two-day summits, quarterly half-day collaboration events and summer content institutes, along with regular virtual collaboration activities using an Edmodo site and virtual book clubs. In Maryland, the SEA pioneered the use of statewide virtual "unconferences," called <u>EdCamps</u>. In these open-forum events, participants collaboratively create the agenda and content during events to address topics that are immediately relevant. EdCamps have been offered both virtually and face to face.

All of the states could enhance the professional learning they offer in three ways.

- In interviews with SREB researchers, teachers as well as school and district leaders were clear that **teachers continue to need opportunities to learn about the standards.** Specifically, they need to deepen their understanding of the content of the standards, effective instructional strategies, analysis of data to guide instructional planning, and the use of online and blended instruction and assessment formats. Teachers need time to practice what they learn, discuss it with colleagues and receive feedback.

- **School and district leaders need deeper professional learning on the standards.** In interviews, school and district leaders as well as teachers shared that many principals and district staff members still possess insufficient knowledge of the standards, which makes it difficult for them to distinguish between effective and ineffective instruction and leaves them unable to provide actionable feedback and guidance to teachers. SEA staff members also shared that many district leaders need greater support for improving the professional learning they offer locally so that it meets the state's standards for professional learning. A district leader summarized this need, saying, "I *provide* a lot of professional development but I don't *get* a lot of professional development."

- **States need to focus on equity and excellence for all students** by offering all educators more professional learning on differentiating instruction and assessment for diverse learners. All of the

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states have offered some professional learning on differentiating instruction, yet these offerings have not appeared to address this topic sufficiently. The offerings have often taken the form of short, stand-alone trainings or sessions during large professional learning events, and have often been targeted for specialists working with English learners or special education students. As achievement gaps persist for the increasingly diverse groups of students attending schools today, all educators need to know how to provide differentiated instruction and assessment for all students. Delaware's <u>Common Ground for the Common Core</u> initiative provides an example of a state program with a sharp focus on this issue. Based on feedback from practitioners and state achievement data, the SEA designed its 2015-16 Common Ground for the Common Core program to include two tracks: closing achievement gaps for students with disabilities and English learners, and deepening literacy practices across the content areas. Leadership teams from participating schools and districts select one of these tracks to focus their learning and improvement efforts throughout the year.

Strong state efforts

The six states with strong efforts in this area are Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee. These states have offered numerous opportunities for individual teachers and school and district leaders to develop their understanding of and skills to implement the standards. And all but Tennessee have provided extensive, long-term, coordinated learning opportunities for local leadership teams including teachers and school and district leaders, reaching a substantial number of — if not all — districts or schools in the state. This work with teams has helped to build deep and broad expertise to implement the standards and provide high-quality professional learning for all educators.

Highlights

In **Alabama**, since 2011, all 136 districts have designated an implementation team made up of teachers (English language arts, math, science, social studies, career and technical education, special education and English learner education), library and media specialists, and school and district leaders. The teams meet quarterly with the SEA to participate in learning sessions and receive technical assistance to support implementation of the Alabama College- & Career-Ready Standards and redelivery of the training at their local sites. In 2015-16, based on feedback from participants, the SEA shifted the design of the quarterly meetings from statewide meetings based on uniform content to regional meetings based on differentiated content to meet local needs. In 2015-16, the SEA also designed the meetings to focus more on evaluating quality, helping the teams build their skills to monitor implementation of the professional learning they implement locally.

In **Delaware**, since 2013-14, school and district guiding teams (including teachers, principals and district staff) in the SEA's Common Ground for the Common Core program have participated in an annual cycle of pre-reading, data collection and three-day learning institutes. These learning activities are supplemented by regular technical assistance such as school-based planning clinics, meetings to share evidence of progress and plan improvements and virtual coaching. This assistance supports implementation of the standards and the professional learning that the teams lead locally. In 2015-16, teams have been focusing their learning and improvement efforts on one of two areas: closing achievement gaps for students with disabilities and English learners, or deepening literacy practices across the content areas. Since 2013-14, 136 of the state's 225 schools and 18 out of 19 districts have participated. In 2013-14, 100 schools participated, followed by 80 in 2014-15 and 40 in 2015-16.

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Tennessee has provided extensive professional learning for school and district leaders. Since 2013, the SEA has offered an integrated leadership course to build school- and district-level capacity to lead implementation of the Tennessee Academic Standards. In 2014, the SEA added an advanced course to its existing basic course to meet the varying needs of leaders. In 2015-16, the courses include four face-to-face sessions at the state's Centers of Regional Excellence, or CORE. Approximately 5,000 leaders participated in one or both of these courses in 2013-14 and 2014-15, and the SEA expects to have served approximately 2,000 in 2015-16. Additionally, during the SEA's summer trainings for teachers, school and district leaders participate in one-day, role-specific trainings on redelivering the summer training content in their local sites. Over 62,000 teachers have participated in the summer trainings since 2012, with 12,000 attending in 2015. In addition, teachers may enroll in the SEA's series of seven-part courses on reading instruction and intervention, organized by grade band, K-12.

Area 4 Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

Use data to inform planning and leadership of statewide professional learning, provide feedback to local leaders and foster shared accountability for excellence in local professional learning

Overview

Effective leaders use data and establish accountability systems so their staff and programs have the feedback they need for continuous improvement. This practice builds a culture of learning so that participants continually reflect on their needs, actions and results. In SEAs, the use of data, feedback and accountability can drive the cycle of leadership for professional learning on state college- and career-readiness standards, helping the SEA to continually strengthen its leadership and support for professional learning.

1 *Establish clear expectations*

2 *Provide support*

4 *Use data and accountability*

3 *Offer professional learning*

States fulfill this area of leadership by

- Using data regularly at the SEA to reflect on statewide needs, progress, challenges and results. The data used includes comprehensive evaluations of state initiatives to help state leaders understand the effects of professional learning on teacher and student outcomes, promote effective practices and weed out ineffective ones.

- Providing feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts, to assist them in their continuous improvement and to foster quality and consistency statewide.

- Holding local districts and schools accountable for continuously improving their professional learning systems.

Read more in the appendix about the look-fors that SREB used to assess state efforts.

Trends in state efforts: *Use of data accountability for continuous improvement*

Use of data

All of the states in the study reported having some type of structure or process in place within the SEA for using data to inform state leadership of professional learning, although the structures and processes varied from state to state. A few states focus the analysis and use of data about professional learning within the office or division in charge of professional learning or within content area teams such as English language arts and math. In other states, SEA leaders meet regularly within the division in charge of professional learning and across other divisions, for example, in quarterly meetings of assistant superintendents and in regular meetings with partner organizations such as regional education centers.

Five states have implemented **multi-layered structures and systematic processes that make extensive use of data,** to foster shared understanding of educator needs across the SEA and to build consistency in training content and communications with the field across content areas and programs. In Alabama,

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Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina and Tennessee, SEA executive leaders meet regularly with staff leaders across their agencies and with representatives of partner organizations such as regional education centers. These other leaders and partners have formed specialized groups to analyze data and make recommendations on the state plans and initiatives. Executive leaders use the recommendations, often in coordination with an advisory council of educators and local leaders, to set the state's direction on professional learning.

In Alabama, for example, senior SEA leaders meet regularly to analyze data and ensure the alignment of efforts to identified needs. The SEA's College- & Career-Ready Standards design team, comprised of leaders from across the agency, analyzes data to inform senior leadership and coordinates the state's initiatives. To monitor district progress on the goals in the state's strategic plan for college and career readiness, PLAN 2020, the state superintendent meets regularly with regional planning teams. These teams include SEA field staff and experts from the Alabama Reading Initiative and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative, as well as staff at the state's Regional In-Service Centers and representatives from higher education, early childhood education and career and technical education. An advisory panel of district curriculum and instruction directors also advises the SEA on professional learning needs and progress.

In all of the states, the SEA reported using multiple types of data to inform their work, such as annual student assessment scores, school accountability ratings, district or school professional learning plans, surveys of educator needs and training session participant feedback. **In six of the states, the SEAs have also gathered data on local implementation of professional learning** beyond the monitoring conducted as part of required interventions for schools in need of improvement. In Alabama, SEA staff members and other specialists meet quarterly with leadership teams from all districts, and the SEA conducts periodic, random district site monitoring visits. In Delaware, SEA staff members visit a school in every district

Use of data and evaluation

Key points

- While all of the states reported that the SEA uses data to inform state leadership of professional learning,

  - Five states have implemented multi-layered structures and systemic processes to make extensive use of **data** across the SEA and with partners and educators.

  - Six states have regularly gathered **data** on local practice through frequent consultation with local leaders and on-site monitoring visits.

  - Five states have recently published or commissioned **program evaluations** of state initiatives, examining the impacts of the programs on teacher knowledge and practice and student outcomes.

Moving forward

- States should embed comprehensive evaluation of their initiatives into regular practice by asking about

  - the quality of the design, fidelity of implementation, educator access and perceptions of quality; and

  - whether the professional learning improved educator knowledge and practice, and improved student mastery of the standards.

- With this kind of information, leaders can better determine where and how to make improvements along the way, and they can confidently assess whether initiatives are worthy of funding, time and effort.

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annually and consult frequently with school and district teams participating in the SEA's Common Ground for the Common Core program. In Kentucky, regional instructional specialists monitor district efforts and work with teams from all districts frequently, as part the SEA's leadership networks. In Louisiana, district support officers meet quarterly with leadership teams from all districts as part of the state's district support network. In Maryland, the state superintendent meets monthly with all district superintendents, and SEA staff meet monthly with district assistant superintendents and curriculum supervisors, and regularly with other district leaders. The SEA also conducts district site visits upon local request. In North Carolina, between 2010-11 and 2014-15, staff at the SEA and regional centers met regularly with leaders in all districts as part of the state's professional learning program.

Evaluation

Five of the states have used one particularly important type of data about professional learning that the other states have not. In 2014-15 or 2015-16, state leaders in Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee published or commissioned program evaluations of major state initiatives. These **program evaluations have examined the measureable impacts of professional learning on teacher knowledge and practice or student outcomes.** These types of evaluations can enhance understandings of professional learning beyond those gleaned from the types of data more typically gathered by SEAs, such as participant perceptions of the quality of a training, self-reported feedback from participants about improved skills, and tallies of the number of educators trained.

High-quality research on the effectiveness of professional learning programs and strategies is lacking nationwide. This shortcoming leaves state leaders with little high-quality evidence upon which to base the design of their professional learning initiatives and activities. In 2010, Learning Forward and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education studied state-level policies and strategies for professional development. The researchers found that, while policies and strategies that seemed promising could be identified, more research was needed to identify a causal relationship between state practices, teacher effectiveness and student achievement. In a 2007 review of research, Yoon and colleagues reviewed 1,343 studies addressing the effect of professional development programs on student learning outcomes in math, science, reading and language arts. They concluded that only nine of the studies employed sufficiently rigorous methods to meet the standards for credible evidence set by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, which is a division of the department's Institute of Education Sciences charged with providing educators with information they need to make evidence-based decisions. Yoon and colleagues noted further that of those nine studies not one was recent; they dated between 1986 and 2003.

The lack of robust research on the effectiveness of professional learning makes it imperative that state leaders embed evaluation of the professional learning they undertake into regular practice. State leaders must insist upon research-based answers to questions such as,

- Was the professional learning designed appropriately to address identified needs and meet the expectations of quality established in the state standards for professional learning?

- Were the activities implemented with fidelity to the design?

- Did everyone who needed the learning have access to it?

- Did educators find the learning experiences meaningful?

- Did the professional learning produce the desired changes — including, did it *improve educator knowledge and practice, and did it improve student mastery of the standards*?

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With this kind of information, leaders can better determine where and how to make improvements along the way, and they can confidently assess whether initiatives are worthy of funding and educators' time and effort.

Making comprehensive evaluation part of regular practice presents challenges. The work requires resources, expertise, staff and time. In particular, systematically monitoring implementation of trainings and follow-up support, and studying impacts on student- and teacher-level outcomes can be especially labor-intensive and expensive. SEAs often do not have the technical expertise that is needed to design rigorous effectiveness studies. Even engaging critically with data and the findings from evaluations to inform ongoing practice and long-term planning requires time and expertise.

Yet, the stakes are too high to let these challenges stymie efforts. The money spent on professional learning nationwide is enormous. A 2015 study by TNTP estimated that the largest 50 school districts in the U.S. devote at least $8 billion to teacher development annually. And, the professional learning funded is not always high quality. In SREB's interviews with educators, several teachers and school and district leaders shared that, year after year, they have sat through low-quality training that has not improved their practice. **Although the financial and human capital needed to make comprehensive program evaluation part of regular practice can be great, when armed with timely monitoring data and comprehensive evaluation results, state leaders can direct funds and effort to programs that work, and stop repeatedly funding costly programs that do not produce needed change.**

Feedback

Data and evaluation are irrelevant if they are not coupled with actionable feedback and public expectations for excellence. State leaders can support stronger practice and decision-making statewide by giving local leaders timely feedback so they can make adjustments and continually refine their efforts.

All of the states in the study reported that in 2014-15 and 2015-16, staff members at the SEA or regional education centers have reviewed the improvement plans or professional learning plans of schools in need of improvement. In eight of the states, staff members at the SEA or regional centers have reviewed the plans of all districts in the state. However, **the depth of feedback given to local leaders on their plans has varied greatly.** In some states, SEA leaders shared that they provide local leaders with direct feedback on their plans, while in other states SEA leaders shared that they do not provide feedback, noting that that they do not see that the SEA has a role in local leadership of professional learning. In the states where regional education service centers work directly with districts and schools to provide support for local professional learning, state leaders shared that the amount and quality of the feedback that local leaders get on their efforts varies across the centers, depending on factors such as the centers' capacity and district or school participation.

Where SEAs do provide regular, in-depth feedback to local leaders, a pattern emerges. They tend to integrate the feedback into other services offered by the SEA. In Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina, the SEAs have conducted regular meetings with local leaders to discuss data and provide feedback on local efforts as *part of* the SEA's professional learning programs, which also incorporate regular technical assistance to support the implementation of professional learning locally. **Learning, support and feedback can create seamless collaboration among local and state leaders.** This collaboration helps local leaders reflect on and improve their efforts; it also enables state leaders to

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Feedback and accountability

Key points

- The depth of feedback given to school and district leaders on local professional learning varies greatly across the states.

- In five states the SEA provides regular, in-depth feedback as part of a seamless cycle of collaboration that integrates professional learning, technical assistance and feedback.

- Few state leaders have the tools they need to demand accountability for high-quality, effective professional learning statewide.

  - Few states gather consistent data on local professional learning practice.

  - Responsibility to improve local professional learning largely rests with schools and districts, many of which lack sufficient resources and expertise to do so.

Moving forward

- The efforts of five states to integrate professional learning, technical assistance and feedback provide models that other states can use — modified to fit local contexts — to foster a seamless cycle of collaboration to improve professional learning.

- To increase shared accountability for effective professional learning, states should consider actions such as the following.

  - Increase feedback channels within the SEA's professional learning and technical assistance services, so the SEA can gather more data and provide timely feedback to local leaders on their practice.

  - Require the inclusion of findings from robust implementation monitoring and rigorous program evaluations in state reporting structures, such as school and district improvement plans, funding applications and program reports.

better understand and meet the needs of educators and students. The efforts of these five states provide a **model for the integration of state programs and services that other states might consider adapting to fit local contexts**.

Accountability

Few state leaders have the tools and authority they need to demand accountability for high-quality, effective professional learning statewide. Just six of the 15 states reported gathering consistent data on local implementation of professional learning beyond the monitoring conducted as part of interventions for schools in need of improvement. Without consistent data on local practice, the SEA cannot identify where efforts are strong and weak, and therefore which schools and districts could benefit most from state assistance. Across all of the states in the study, other than for the schools in need of improvement, the responsibility to improve local professional learning practice rests solely with schools and districts, many of which lack sufficient resources and expertise to do so.

National professional learning experts such as Learning Forward, and national leadership experts such as the Council of Chief State School Officers, consider shared responsibility among state and local leaders for a state's education workforce a necessary element of an effective professional learning system. States may want to explore ways to intensify a shared focus on excellence in local practice and **increase shared accountability for providing results**. States might consider actions such as the following.

- **Increase feedback** channels within the SEA's professional learning and technical assistance services, so the SEA can gather more data and provide timely feedback to local leaders on their practice.

- Require the **inclusion of findings from robust implementation monitoring and rigorous program evaluations in state reporting structures**, such as school and district improvement plans, funding applications, and program reports.

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Strong state efforts

Overall, the four states with strong efforts in the use of data, feedback and accountability for continuous improvement are Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee. These states have gone further than others to implement clear structures and routines across the agency and with external partners and educators to regularly analyze data. These states use data extensively to inform state professional learning efforts and to foster shared understanding of educator needs and consistency in training content and communications across content areas and programs. These states have recently conducted or commissioned comprehensive evaluations of state-provided professional learning that have examined impacts on teacher or student outcomes. These states have provided extensive feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts through multiple channels.

Highlights

In **Kentucky**, the SEA has a *delivery unit that builds the agency's capacity in project management, data analysis and data-driven decision-making.* The SEA developed a research plan for each priority in its strategic plan, and the delivery unit monitors progress. Unit staff members participate in *cross-functional teams* as part of the agency's overall strategic planning process. A statewide teacher advisory council also provides the state commissioner of education with input on progress and needs. The SEA has used various types of data to inform its work, including *program evaluations* that analyze the impact of professional development initiatives on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes. Recent evaluations have included a 2015 report on an external evaluation of Kentucky's 2012-13 Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative implementation and an internal evaluation of the SEA's implementation of the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System. The SEA provides direct, real-time *feedback* to local leaders on their efforts through its regional instructional specialists and as part of its work with district teams in the Leadership Networks initiative.

In **Tennessee**, the SEA bases its leadership of professional learning on the priorities identified in its 2015 strategic plan. *Interlocking teams meet regularly* to analyze data and plan and monitor professional learning activities: the state commissioner of education's executive leadership team of three deputy commissioners; the senior leadership team of assistant commissioners across the SEA; and the academic leadership team of assistant commissioners, executive directors and Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) staff. Additionally, a professional development council of stakeholders advises the commissioner. The SEA *regularly uses various types of data to inform its work, including program evaluations* that analyze the impact of professional development initiatives on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes. Recent evaluations have included a 2014 study by the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's STEM Professional Development Program, an internal study of the SEA's 2012 math summer trainings and other evaluations the SEA has commissioned of its summer trainings since 2013. The SEA provides *feedback* on local professional learning efforts to leaders in schools and districts in need of improvement as part of the technical assistance provided to these leaders.

Moving Forward

Six Key State Actions to Strengthen State Leadership and Support for Professional Learning on State College- and Career-Readiness Standards

The recommendations for moving forward from each section in the report are synthesized below to highlight the most critical actions for fostering high-quality, effective professional learning for all educators on state college- and career-readiness standards. Any one of these actions alone may exert modest leverage. Taken together, these actions can promote a robust, coherent system that includes expectations, policies, tools, services and communication to support continual improvement.

Many factors inform a state's approach to leadership of professional learning, such as geography, number of districts and schools in the state, SEA and district relationships with partners such as regional centers, capacity at the SEA, and funding. However, **any state could draw on the following recommendations and on the strong state efforts highlighted throughout this report to meet the specific needs of their own state**.

1. **Foster more data-based decision-making about professional learning and strengthen shared accountability for excellence at the state and local levels.**

    - *Systematically monitor the quality and implementation of state professional learning* in order to make adjustments along the way and address emerging needs.

    - *Rigorously examine measureable outcomes of state professional learning*, including whether educators found it useful and relevant and whether it impacted teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes.

    - *Support enhanced monitoring and evaluation of professional learning at the local level* through guidance, tools, and assistance to school and district leaders.

    - *Strengthen shared accountability for excellence.*

        - Increase feedback channels within the SEA's professional learning and technical assistance services, so the SEA can gather more data and provide timely feedback to local leaders on their practice.

        - Require the inclusion of findings from robust implementation monitoring and rigorous program evaluations of local professional learning in state reporting structures, such as school and district improvement plans, funding applications and program reports.

Moving forward

Six key state actions

1. Foster more *data-based decision-making* about professional learning and strengthen shared *accountability* for excellence at the state and local levels.

2. Integrate the use of guidance and tools, technical assistance, professional learning and feedback in a s*eamless cycle of collaboration* to foster continual improvement.

3. Enhance the use of *technology* in professional learning.

4. Provide *ongoing professional learning* for educators to address the most critical statewide needs and gaps.

5. Focus on *equity and excellence* for all students.

6. Devote *resources* strategically to professional learning.

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2. **Integrate the use of guidance and tools, technical assistance, professional learning and feedback in a seamless cycle of collaboration to foster continual improvement.**

   - This integration provides multiple points at which educators can engage with new knowledge, implement their learning and reflect on their practice — increasing the chance that new learning will impact teaching and student achievement.

3. **Enhance the use of technology in professional learning.**

   - Update the state's digital, on-demand resources continually to enhance the amount, reach, relevance and efficiency of state support for educator learning. As new technologies emerge, SEAs should keep pace by using them strategically in their programs to support educator development. In doing so, SEAs can enhance their services and also provide local leaders with models for using technology effectively to improve educator and student learning.

4. **Provide ongoing professional learning for educators to address statewide needs and fill local gaps.**

   - *Teachers* need to deepen their understanding of the standards, effective instructional strategies, analysis of data to guide instruction and the use of online instruction and assessment formats. They need time to collaborate, practice what they learn and receive feedback.

   - *School and district leaders* need to better understand the standards and effective instructional strategies, and how to provide actionable feedback to teachers. They need support for improving the professional learning they offer locally so that it meets the state's standards for professional learning.

5. **Focus on equity and excellence for all students.**

   - Offer more guidance and tools as well as professional learning to help *all* educators learn about *differentiating instruction*, especially for English learners and students with disabilities, so that schools can better serve their increasingly diverse student bodies.

6. **Devote resources strategically to professional learning.**

   - Use data to identify the biggest needs and gaps in the professional learning of educators statewide, where the state can provide the most critical support.

   - Work with stakeholders, including educators, legislators, regional education centers, universities, and trusted partners such as external funders and national expert organizations, to target resources for professional learning. Resources could include funding, time, technology, local and cross-state partnerships, staff positions and expertise, and other support.

   - Strategically leverage resources and design initiatives creatively so that the efforts can be sustained over time.

Appendix

Project Overview

SREB's Benchmarking State Implementation of College- and Career-Readiness Standards project studied state efforts in 2014-15 and 2015-16 to foster effective professional learning for educators on state college- and career-readiness standards in English language arts and math, K-12. SREB uses the findings of this study to provide state leaders with actionable feedback on and support for their work, to inform the continuous improvement of state education policies and practice. SREB worked with representatives from the states and national experts in professional learning to shape the focus of the study, to ensure that the findings were accurate and to inform SREB's ongoing efforts to support state leaders.

Additional benchmarking reports on other topics related to the implementation of state college- and career-readiness standards are forthcoming from SREB. More information is available on the project Web page.

Methodology

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

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

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

Look-Fors

SREB, in collaboration with state representatives and professional learning experts, developed a set of look-fors (criteria) for state work in each of the four areas examined in this study. In each of the following tables, the column on the left lists the look-fors that SREB used to analyze state efforts. The other columns graphically represent SREB's method of assessing the level of state implementation. The X's in the cells indicate the extent to which state efforts address the look-fors at each level of implementation. Notations in parentheses indicate variations in meeting a look-for. SREB researchers categorized state efforts into one of three levels of implementation.

- *Minimal,* indicating state leadership addresses some of the look-fors

- *Essential,* indicating state leadership addresses the look-fors SREB considers necessary for providing leadership and supporting local efforts

- *Strong,* indicating that in addition to the necessary look-fors, state leadership offers substantial support to foster quality and consistency statewide

The state profile reports, available on the project Web page, describe each state's efforts in each area.

1 Establish Clear Expectations

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

2 Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support

A: Guidance and tools

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

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

2 **Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support** (continued)

B: Technical assistance

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

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

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

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

3 Offer Professional Learning

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

4 Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

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

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

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