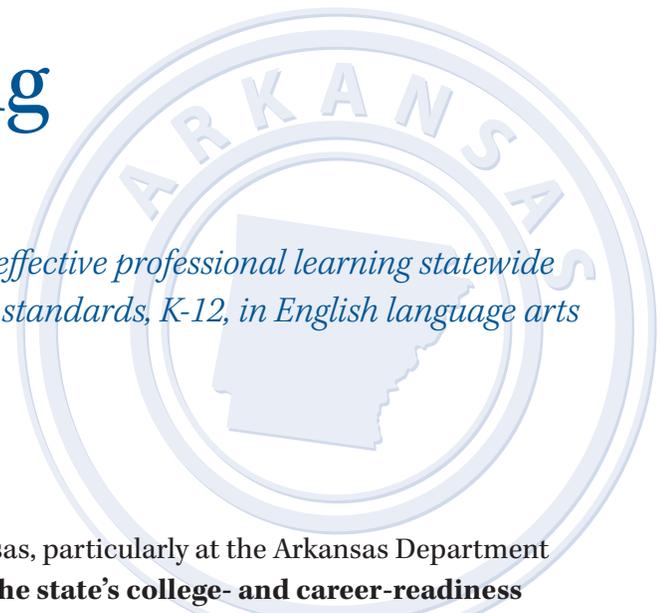


Professional Learning

Arkansas



In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Arkansas fostered effective professional learning statewide for all educators on its college- and career-readiness standards, K-12, in English language arts (ELA) and math?

SREB researchers gathered information on efforts in Arkansas, particularly at the Arkansas Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state’s college- and career-readiness standards, the Common Core State Standards**. In collaboration with SREB states and national experts, SREB identified a set of expected state actions — “look-fors” — in **four areas of state leadership in professional learning**. The researchers reviewed online sources and interviewed department leaders and educators to assess the state’s efforts.

State efforts in each area fell into one of three levels of implementation:

- **Minimal**, indicating state leadership addresses some of the look-fors
- **Essential**, indicating state leadership addresses the look-fors SREB considers necessary for providing leadership and supporting local efforts
- **Strong**, indicating that in addition to the necessary look-fors, state leadership offers substantial support to foster quality and consistency statewide

The *Project Overview and Look-Fors* document and state profile reports are available on the project [Web page](#).

Highlights for Arkansas

- **Strong expectations for professional learning** through adoption of robust standards for professional learning and Arkansas Department of Education rules
- **A planning tool for college and career readiness focused on professional learning**, the Guide for Professional Development Planning for Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

1 Establish Clear Expectations

Has the state established clear expectations for high-quality professional learning for all educators on the state college- and career-readiness standards through state professional learning standards or other policy documents?

Arkansas provides strong support.

- Arkansas adopted Learning Forward’s 2011 Standards for Professional Learning. These standards are widely accepted as embodying expectations that are rigorous, research-based, comprehensive and outcomes-oriented for educators and students.
- Additionally, the department’s 2014 Rules Governing Professional Development require that school and district professional development is high quality and aligned to the Common Core.

2 Provide Guidance, Technical Assistance and Other Support

Does the state education agency provide information, guidance, tools, direct assistance and other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation, to support local efforts to deliver high-quality, college- and career-readiness standards-aligned professional learning that meets the needs of all teachers in service of all students?

Guidance and tools

Arkansas provides essential support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
 - Arkansas On-Campus Standards Review (OSR) checklist
 - A Guide for Professional Development Planning for Implementation of the Common Core State Standards to support local planning, implementation and evaluation of professional learning on the Common Core
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
 - A variety of archived trainings and content area learning tools
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
 - The department requires districts to provide yearlong induction and mentoring programs for new teachers. Mentor teachers must be trained to support new teachers on the Danielson Framework for Teaching, which is widely regarded as aligned to the Common Core. To support local programs, the department provides funding and training for the mentor teachers (in collaboration with regional Education Service Cooperatives, ESCs) and monitors local programs.
 - The department requires districts to provide yearlong induction and mentoring programs to new administrators based on the state leader evaluation standards (which are based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards – widely regarded as aligned to the Common Core). To support local leaders, the department provides training videos and online modules.

Technical assistance

Arkansas provides essential support.

- The department provides intensive technical assistance to schools and districts in need of improvement by reviewing annual Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (ACSIPs), conducting annual school scholastic audits and offering other targeted support based on local needs. Department staff in regional Education Renewal Zones (ERZs), housed within institutions of higher education, also work directly with schools in need of improvement.
- Arkansas’ ESCs and regional STEM Centers develop and deliver assistance to enhance professional learning based on local needs.

“We are focusing heavily on developing the ArkansasIDEAS website to give educators access to more online learning opportunities and tools — in addition to traditional face-to-face training opportunities.”

— Arkansas Department of Education staff member

Funding for professional learning in 2014-15 and 2015-16:

Arkansas used or is using state funds, federal funds, a State Personnel Development Grant and funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Arkansas provides essential support.

- Technology
 - Repositories of online, on-demand professional learning resources: [ArkansasIDEAS](#) and [CCSS Toolbox](#) websites
- Policies and opportunities to foster flexibility and innovation in professional learning
 - Charter schools may be approved to waive certain state rules or regulations to improve professional learning.
 - Schools can apply to the department's commissioner of education to become schools of innovation, implementing flexibilities for a four-year period to improve professional learning.
 - Districts can apply to the state board of education to waive certain state requirements or regulations to improve professional learning.

3 Offer Professional Learning

Does the state education agency offer coordinated professional learning opportunities that develop educators' understanding of the state college- and career-readiness standards and skills to implement them — and that build local capacity to lead high-quality professional learning for all educators?

“We work very closely with regional ESCs and STEM Centers and with the Arkansas Educational Television Network to align our professional learning opportunities for and communications to educators statewide.”

— Arkansas Department of Education staff member

Context: The department partners heavily with Arkansas' regional ESCs, STEM Centers and ERZs that deliver most of the state-sponsored professional learning and technical assistance directly to local educators, schools and districts. The department maximizes the capacity of its small staff by focusing its efforts on schools and districts in need of improvement. The department also focuses on developing online tools to enable more educators to directly access state resources to meet their particular needs.

Arkansas provides essential support.

- Professional learning for teachers
 - The department collaborates with the ESCs, STEM Centers and ERZs to provide voluntary, statewide, face-to-face and online Common Core trainings. Over 3,000 ELA teachers and 1,500 math teachers participated in one or more sessions in 2014-15.
 - The department collaborates with the ESCs, STEM Centers and ERZs to provide Response to Intervention (RTI) Arkansas training on integrating literacy and math into social studies, science and the arts to support teachers in implementing the state science, social studies and fine arts standards, which Arkansas revised to align to the Common Core.
 - Since 2011, the department has collaborated with SREB, the ESCs and STEM Centers to provide Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) training to over 70 specialists. These specialists have in turn provided training and onsite follow-up support to over 700 teachers from 140 schools. In 2015-16, teacher teams from all middle grades schools and high schools in the state have access to LDC and MDC support.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
 - In partnership with the ESCs, STEM Centers and the Arkansas Leadership Academy, the department offers yearlong programs, multi-year institutes and stand-alone sessions on instructional facilitation, coaching and leading professional learning.
 - The LDC and MDC initiative includes training for school leaders.
 - The RTI Arkansas training includes a leader-specific module.

4 Use Data and Accountability for Continuous Improvement

Does the state education agency use data to inform its planning and leadership of statewide professional learning, and does it provide feedback to local leaders and hold districts accountable for excellence in local professional learning?

Arkansas undertakes *essential* work in this area.

- Within the department's division of learning services, leaders meet regularly to analyze data and to plan professional learning. Department leaders also work with regional partners to analyze local data to inform their work in the field.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. However, it has not recently conducted comprehensive program evaluations that include rigorous examination of the impacts of professional learning on teacher knowledge and practice or student outcomes, a crucial step in understanding the effects of state efforts.
- In providing feedback to local leaders and accountability for excellence:
 - The department provides direct feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts through the department's review of annual ACSIPs and scholastic audits of schools in need of improvement.
 - Department leaders expect schools and districts to leverage the support and funding they receive for professional learning to make continuous improvement on school and district professional learning systems.

MOVING FORWARD: *Practices for Arkansas to consider*

- Explore ways to provide more **coordinated, comprehensive technical assistance and professional learning to local leadership teams**. This would support the long-term work of building deep and broad capacity in schools and districts to implement high-quality professional learning for all educators. See work with local leadership teams noted in the Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky and Louisiana profiles.
- Undertake **more comprehensive program evaluations** to analyze the efficacy of professional learning initiatives — in particular, their impacts on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes — to help identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones. See program evaluations noted in the Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee profiles.

All related state profiles and reports are on the project [Web page](#).