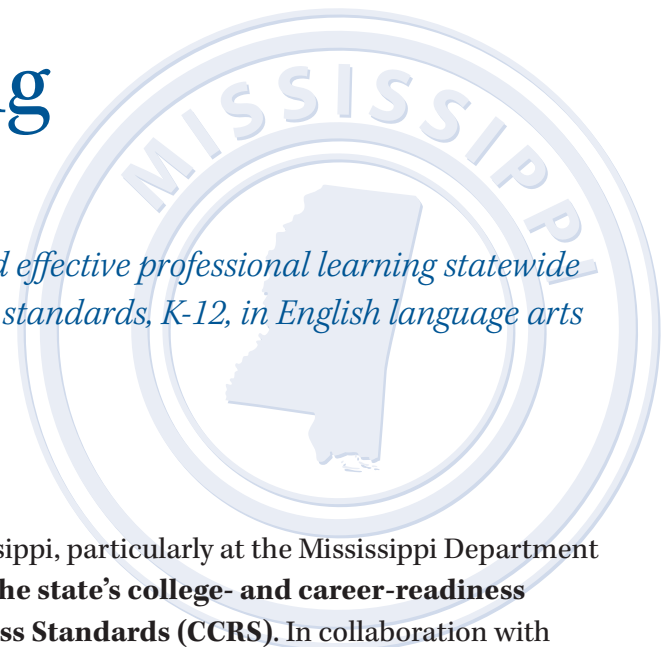


# Professional Learning Mississippi

*In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Mississippi 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 Mississippi, particularly at the Mississippi Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state’s college- and career-readiness standards, the Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards (CCRS)**. 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 Mississippi

- **Strong expectations for professional learning** through adoption of robust standards for professional learning and state requirement for districts to align local professional development programs with these standards
- **Notable use of program evaluations to inform state efforts.** In 2014-15 and 2015-16, the department collaborated with the Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast on an evaluation of its K-3 early literacy initiative that examined changes in teacher practice. Results are expected to be released in 2016. In 2016, the department also conducted an evaluation of its career and technical education program, which examined the impacts of training on student literacy outcomes, finding positive and significant results.

## 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?*

**Mississippi provides strong support.**

- Mississippi 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.
- Mississippi's 2015 Public School Accountability Standards established the accreditation requirement that districts must implement a professional development program aligned with the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning.

## 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**

**Mississippi provides essential support.**

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - [Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards Scaffolding Documents](#) aid educators' understanding of how to teach the CCRS, along with videos and archived training materials on using the documents
  - Literacy-Based Promotion Act of 2013 tools, including an implementation guide on training and coaching for teachers
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - A variety of archived trainings, guidance and instructional planning resources
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State law establishes that districts can voluntarily participate in the Beginning Teacher Support Program provided by the department and the Mississippi Teacher Center. To help new teachers learn about the CCRS, mentor teachers receive training based on the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards, which are widely accepted as aligned to college- and career-readiness standards.

**Technical assistance**

**Mississippi provides essential support.**

- As part of the state's regional service delivery model, all districts can request technical assistance from the department's Technical Assistance and Professional Development Menu of Services. Department professional development coordinators (PDCs) provide assistance onsite or at Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) locations.
- To assist schools in need of improvement and their districts, the department provides quarterly and summer training for school leaders, as well as implementation improvement specialists who conduct monthly site visits and provide support for identifying needs and developing, implementing and monitoring school improvement.
- In September 2014, the department and Learning Forward Mississippi provided optional two-day training for district leaders on implementing the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning.

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

Mississippi used or is using state funds — including funds for professional development on the college- and career-readiness standards, Literacy-Based Promotion Act training, and the Principal and Superintendent Academies — and also federal funds and a School Improvement Grant.

## Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

### Mississippi provides *essential* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories of online, on-demand resources: [SharePoint](#) site, iTunes U courses and the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling ([LETRS](#)) [Mississippi Professional Development Resource Center](#)
- 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.
  - Through state law, districts can apply to become districts of innovation and waive certain state requirements 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 participate in a community of practitioners with staff in the Alabama State Department of Education. Either they come here or we go there. We discuss how we’re tackling various efforts, and we collaborate on common issues. It’s really helpful to talk with folks who are in our shoes.”*

— Mississippi Department of Education staff member

**Context:** RESAs facilitate the majority of state-sponsored professional learning and technical assistance directly to teachers, schools and districts in Mississippi. The department partners heavily with RESAs and focuses on providing online, on-demand professional learning resources to increase the reach of the department’s small staff.

### Mississippi provides *essential* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - In 2014-15, the state board of education helped to launch the regional service delivery model. The department hired a number of PDCs to offer all districts professional learning for their teachers, onsite or facilitated at RESA locations. Districts select training from the department’s Technical Assistance and Professional Development Menu of Services.
  - To support local implementation of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act of 2013, in 2014 the department partnered with the RESAs and Voyager Sopris Learning to offer LETRS literacy training. The department intends to train all of the state’s 10,000 K-3 teachers and principals and also its K-8 special education teachers by the end of 2015-16. In 2015, the department deployed literacy coaches to targeted K-3 schools for additional support.
  - The department offers training for math teachers on Voyager Sopris Learning’s NUMBERS program in 2015-16.
  - In 2014-15, the department partnered with SREB to begin statewide implementation of Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative practices and tools through trained school-based coaches and the PDCs.
  - Since 2012-13, the department has partnered with 17 career and technical education centers across the state and SEDL to provide the Academics, Skills, and Knowledge in Career Technical Education (ASK-CTE) program that includes ongoing, job-embedded coaching and professional learning communities for teams of teachers at each of the 17 centers on literacy and career readiness.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - Since 2013-14, the department has offered annual, one-day regional principal meetings to provide professional learning and share information on the CCRS, literacy, aligned assessments and Response to Intervention.
  - In summer 2015, RESAs redelivered department-developed, two-day training for principals on numeracy, designing assessment, coaching and leading school change.

- In 2014-15, the department selected superintendents from 19 of the state’s 144 districts for the first cohort of participants for the Superintendents’ Academy. In 2015-16, an additional 22 participants joined the second cohort. Participants learn about instructional technology and decision-making and visit other districts to share best practices.

## 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?*

### Mississippi undertakes *essential work* in this area.

- The department uses a centralized approach to data usage. Department leaders meet monthly to analyze data and identify statewide professional learning needs. They also plan, coordinate and monitor professional learning initiatives. In 2015, the board adopted a 2016-20 strategic plan that includes a focus on state-provided training and coaching, with identified success measures.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably, in 2014-15 and 2015-16, the department collaborated with the Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast on an evaluation of its K-3 early literacy initiative that examined changes in teacher practice. Results are expected to be released in 2016. In 2016, the department also conducted an evaluation of its ASK-CTE program, which examined the impacts of training on student literacy outcomes, finding positive and significant results. Such information helps state leaders identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones.
- In providing feedback to local leaders and accountability for excellence:
  - The department provides direct, real-time feedback to local leaders on their professional learning efforts in schools in need of improvement through school improvement implementation specialists who conduct monthly site visits and assist in developing school improvement plans.
  - 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 Mississippi to consider*

- Provide educators with more **online, on-demand tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning, including exemplars of professional learning**, such as archived materials from high-quality professional learning programs. These tools and exemplars can serve as immediate learning resources and models for local leaders as they develop professional learning systems. See guidance, tools and exemplars noted in the Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina profiles.
- Explore ways to provide **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.
- Continue to undertake **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](#).**