Professional Learning
North Carolina

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has North Carolina fostered effective professional learning state-wide 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 North Carolina, particularly at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (specifically 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 North Carolina

- **Strong technical assistance and professional learning for district leadership teams** across all 115 districts in the state in 2014-15.

- **Strong use of data to inform state efforts**. Interlocking leadership councils coordinate the use of data across the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to guide the state's leadership of professional learning: the senior leadership council (state superintendent and department leaders), the senior advisory council (directors in the department's school improvement division) and the service support teams (department coordinators, coaches and other experts). Additionally, between 2011 and 2015, the department commissioned program evaluations of its Race to the Top initiatives, which evaluated the impact of initiatives on student outcomes. Such information helps state leaders identify effective practices and weed out ineffective ones.

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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?

North Carolina provides *essential* support.

- North Carolina 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.

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

North Carolina provides *essential* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - School Improvement Planning Guide and Template
  - Read to Achieve Comprehensive Reading Plan and Guide
  - Data Resource Guide and User Manual
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Extensive sets of exemplars and resources, including courses for district leaders on establishing systems and structures for planning, designing and evaluating high-quality professional development
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State board of education policy requires new teachers to participate in a three-year induction program. To assist local leaders in developing programs aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and the state teacher evaluation standards, the department offers a Beginning Teacher Wiki space (allows users to access and edit content online), a mentor teacher handbook, an online mentor training course and virtual meetings for local program coordinators. It also facilitates meetings that promote collaboration between higher education and K-12 to improve local programs.

Technical assistance

In 2014-15, North Carolina provided *strong* support.
In 2015-16, it provides *essential* support.

- Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, department staff collaborated with its 21 regional professional development leads (RPDLs) and the state's eight Regional Education Service Alliances (RESAs) to provide intensive, ongoing technical assistance for leadership teams in all 115 districts. Teams learned about, planned for and implemented the Common Core, and participated in other professional learning. The number of RPDLs decreased from 21 to four in 2015-16, as Race to the Top (RTTT) funds ended.
- Beginning in 2015-16, through the statewide system of support, the department shifted to a consulting and coaching role to support districts and schools, address common statewide needs, coordinate services to low-performing schools, and provide customized assistance on an as-needed basis. Regional consultants from across the department's divisions work together to determine what targeted support is necessary based on the needs of each region.

"The amount of materials available on Home Base has really increased. There is so much available now. This allows us to pull from them so that we can really address the standards, as well as the needs of our students."

— North Carolina teacher

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

North Carolina provides *essential* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand professional learning resources: Content area LiveBinders and <u>Wiki spaces</u>, iTunes U courses, and LEAD Ed webinars and courses
  - Learning management system: <u>Home Base</u>, which allows educators to access professional learning based on their evaluation results, and Canvas, which houses educator and student learning experiences
- 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 for school improvement waivers from state law or board policy, including those regulating how they use time and funds to improve professional learning.

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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?

"When the Governor's Teacher Network started, we did not know where it would go. Over 400 teachers participated. We gave them very specific support and tasks, and it just grew into a true professional learning network. The feedback we got from participants was tremendous. They said they'd never participated in anything like this before."

— North Carolina Department of Public Instruction staff member

Context: Since 2010-11, department RPDLs have have designed and delivered the majority of state-sponsored professional learning and technical assistance directly to teachers, schools and districts, partnering with the state's eight RESAs and other state entities. In 2015-16, to leverage collective expertise and resources and to maximize the impact of its small professional learning staff (which was reduced as RTTT funding ended), the department shifted to a consulting and coaching role to provide professional learning and technical assistance to districts and schools to address common statewide needs, support low-performing schools and offer customized support on an as-needed basis. RESAs also provide their own trainings and support to local systems, which can vary across the regions.

In 2014-15, North Carolina provided *strong* support.
In 2015-16 it provides *essential* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, a few teachers served on their district's leadership team in all 115 districts in the state. The department's 21 RPDLs collaborated heavily with the state's eight RESAs to provide an intensive, comprehensive professional learning program consisting of Summer Institutes, biannual Fidelity Support Sessions and extensive online resources, all designed to build local capacity to transform local professional learning and to model best practices in using technology. Additionally, RESAs provided other trainings throughout the year, and the RPDLs offered 182 additional sessions for districts.
  - Between summer 2014 and spring 2015, through its Governor's Teacher Network initiative, the department selected and worked with approximately 450 outstanding teachers from across the state to develop professional learning resources for local professional learning communities (PLCs) and aligned instructional resources for inclusion in Home Base.
  - In 2015, 121 schools from 41 districts began partnering with SREB to provide teachers and school leaders with Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) trainings and coaches for site-based support.
  - The department hosts a statewide Cross-District Strategic Solutions professional learning network, open to all teachers and local leaders. Participants share issues and best practices through biannual, face-to-face regional sessions and regular webinars.

- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, school leaders, district content specialists and district leaders served on their districts' leadership teams.
  - School and district leaders can participate in LDC and MDC training.
  - School and district leaders can participate in the Cross-District Strategic Solutions network.
  - The department provided cohort-based yearlong regional leadership academies for principals, focusing on transforming low-performing schools. The third and final cohort began in 2014-15.
  - In 2014-15, the department offered a pilot observation calibration training program to train principals on observing teachers and providing feedback; 422 principals from 20 districts participated.

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?

North Carolina undertakes *strong* work in this area.

- The department uses a systematic, centralized approach to data usage. A network of interlocking councils guides state leadership on professional learning. The senior leadership council, made up of the state superintendent and department leaders, meets regularly to analyze data, identify needs and determine priorities for state initiatives. The senior advisory council, made up of directors in the department's school improvement division, oversees implementation of the state initiatives and monitors progress. Service support teams, made up of department coordinators, coaches and other experts, identify regional needs and deliver direct support to schools and districts. The department also gathers information from educator advisory councils to identify needs and track progress.
- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably between 2011 and 2015, the department commissioned annual program evaluations of its RTTT projects, which examined impacts on student outcomes on a number of measures. (Findings included positive results on graduation rates and NAEP scores.) 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 professional learning efforts in schools and districts in need of improvement, including feedback by department staff stationed at targeted schools and coaches who work directly with district leaders.
  - 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.