Professional Learning
Tennessee

In 2014-15 and 2015-16, how has Tennessee 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 Tennessee, particularly at the Tennessee Department of Education, to foster effective **professional learning on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, the Tennessee Academic 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 Tennessee

- **Strong online, on-demand guidance and tools**, including extensive learning resources and exemplars, and the Teacher Leader Guidebook, which provide models of district best practices for fostering teacher leadership and guidance for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning on the Tennessee Academic Standards

- **Strong professional learning offerings**. Between 2012 and 2015, the Tennessee Department of Education trained nearly 1,370 teachers to serve as learning leaders to facilitate summer trainings for teachers. Approximately 15,000 teachers attended in 2014, and 12,000 did so in 2015, totaling over 62,000 teachers thus far. Approximately 7,000 school and district leaders so far have attended basic and advanced integrated leadership courses. These offerings help to build local knowledge of the standards and the capacity to lead high-quality professional learning.

- **Strong use of data to inform state efforts**. Interlocking teams — the state commissioner of education's executive leadership team of three deputy commissioners; the senior leadership team of assistant commissioners across the department; and the academic leadership team of assistant commissioners, executive directors and Centers of Regional Excellence staff — coordinate the use of data across the agency. Additionally, the department has undertaken evaluations of key professional learning programs, examining their impacts on teacher practice and student outcomes.

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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?

Tennessee provides *essential* support.

- Tennessee 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

Tennessee provides *strong* support.

- Tools for planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning
  - Professional learning community (PLC) guides and resources
  - Coordinated Spending Guide to support districts in maximizing resources for activities that improve educator performance and outcomes for students
  - Teacher Leader Guidebook that includes models and district best practices to foster teacher leadership and specific guidance on planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning on the Tennessee Academic Standards
- Professional learning resources and exemplars
  - Extensive sets of professional learning resources and archived materials from the department's summer trainings, reading courses and integrated leadership courses
- Support for educator induction and mentoring programs
  - State board of education rules require districts to collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide induction programs for new teachers. Tennessee's state leader evaluation rubric includes a criterion on implementing induction programs to develop teachers' knowledge and skills to impact student outcomes.
  - The department requires new principals, assistant principals and supervisors to complete its Tennessee Academy for School Leaders (TASL) program, which focuses on building capacity to guide implementation of the Tennessee Academic Standards.

Technical assistance

Tennessee provides *essential* support.

- The department's eight Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) work closely with other department staff to offer coordinated, differentiated support for districts statewide. The kind and amount of services the CORE deliver varies depending on a variety of factors including differences in regional capacity and local participation.
- The department and CORE provide intensive technical assistance to schools and districts in need of improvement, including through developing and monitoring improvement plans, convenings for principals, implementing school turnaround strategies, and facilitating PLCs and other training for educators.

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

Tennessee used or is using state and federal funds, and grants, including Race to the Top, State Personnel Development Grant and Mathematics and Science Partnerships.

Other support, such as technology and flexibility for innovation

Tennessee provides *essential* support.

- Technology
  - Repositories offering extensive online, on-demand resources: <u>TNCore</u> website (with resources migrating to an <u>eduToolbox</u> website in 2016), <u>Educator Training</u> and <u>Educator Resources</u> Web pages, and the <u>READ Tennessee</u> site
- 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.
  - In 2015-16, the department is conducting a schoolwide consolidation pilot for Title I schools to combine federal, state and local funds. The department's goal is to increase the flexibility in the use of funds and encourage targeting funds to identified needs and 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?

"For our learning leaders training, we have a peer learning model. We held a rigorous process to select teachers to facilitate our training — teachers who are currently using the standards and the practices, and who know the challenges that come along with that. We trained them deeply, and they turned around the trainings to their colleagues. That built local expertise and has been really beneficial to our model and to the teachers across the state."

— Tennessee Department of Education staff member

Context

- The department, guided by its 2015 strategic plan and supported by the board's 2012-20 Master Plan, takes an active role in providing direct professional learning to educators statewide. To accomplish this, the department employs CORE to deliver state professional learning activities and offer ongoing training and support.
- The department's flagship professional learning efforts for the Tennessee Academic Standards (summer trainings, reading course and integrated leadership courses) were established with the state's Race to the Top (RTTT) grant, which concluded in 2015. In 2015-16, the department sustains these initiatives by seeking other external grants, identifying new ways to use existing state and federal funds, and employing new strategies for distributing costs (for example, by using the CORE as regional training hubs).

Tennessee provides *strong* support.

- Professional learning for teachers
  - The department's summer trainings provide educators with long-term, coordinated learning opportunities to build knowledge and skills to implement the Tennessee Academic Standards. The trainings also build educator capacity for implementing high-quality professional learning in their local sites. Between 2012 and 2015, the department trained nearly 1,370 teachers to serve as learning leaders (previously called core coaches) to facilitate teacher training on ELA and math. Over 62,000 teachers have participated in the summer trainings since 2012. In 2014, 15,000 attended, and 12,000 did so in 2015. CORE complement this training by offering support to districts throughout the year (the support provided varies depending on a variety of factors including differences in regional capacity and local participation).
  - The department, in collaboration with Voyager Sopris Learning and CORE, provides a series of seven-part reading courses organized by grade band K-12 on reading instruction and intervention. Teachers may voluntarily participate.
- Professional learning for school and district leaders
  - Since 2013, the department has offered an integrated leadership course to build school- and district-level capacity to lead implementation of the standards. In 2014, the department added an advanced course to meet the varying needs of leaders.

In 2015-16, the course includes four face-to-face sessions at the CORE. Approximately 5,000 leaders participated in one or both of these courses in 2013-14 and 2014-15, and the department expects to serve approximately 2,000 in 2015-16.

– During the summer trainings for teachers, school and district leaders participate in one-day, role-specific trainings on redelivering the summer trainings content in their local sites.

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?

"One thing that is different about our work with school leaders is our statewide integrated leadership course. Participants focus deeply on content. What should ELA instruction look like in the classroom? What are the changes you should be seeing in math classrooms? This approach has been really well-received because the principal should be the instructional leader in the building."

— Tennessee Department of Education staff member

Tennessee undertakes *strong* work in this area.

- The department uses a systematic, centralized approach to data usage. The department bases its leadership of professional learning on the priorities identified in its 2015 strategic plan. Interlocking teams — the state commissioner of education's executive leadership team of three deputy commissioners; the senior leadership team of assistant commissioners across the department; and the academic leadership team of assistant commissioners, executive directors and CORE staff — meet regularly to analyze data; consider feedback from CORE, advisory councils and others; and plan, implement and monitor professional learning activities. Additionally, a professional development council of stakeholders advises the department.

- The department regularly uses various types of data to inform its work. Notably, it reviewed findings of a 2014 evaluation by the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's STEM Professional Development Program, one of the state's RTTT initiatives. In 2013, the department published findings from an evaluation of its 2012 math summer trainings. Both of these evaluations showed positive and significant impacts on teacher and student outcomes. The department has commissioned additional evaluations of its summer trainings since 2013. 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 feedback on local professional learning efforts to leaders in schools and districts in need of improvement through technical assistance that includes support for improvement planning and monitoring.

  – 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 Tennessee to consider

- Explore ways to augment the Tennessee Department of Education's strong, role-specific trainings for teachers and leaders to provide **coordinated, comprehensive technical assistance and professional learning to local leadership teams**. Engaging with local teams can support the long-term work of building capacity within and across schools and districts to implement high-quality professional learning for all teachers. See work with local leadership teams noted in the Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky and Louisiana profiles.

- Continue the department's strong work in undertaking **comprehensive program evaluations** to analyze the efficacy of professional development 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 and North Carolina profiles.

All related state profiles and reports are on the project Web page.