

State celebrates schools' professional learning redesign



*Educators from **St. Georges Technical High School** showcased their school's professional learning work at a statewide event earlier this month ([more photos](#)).*

For the past year, Principal Shanta Reynolds and his team from St. Georges Technical High School in the New Castle County Vo-Tech School District have been focused on providing teachers with effective professional learning opportunities that improve student literacy skills. Using walkthroughs, peer visits and professional learning communities (PLCs) to review data and give teachers meaningful feedback on their instructional practices, Reynolds says the work has transformed how the school views professional learning.

“The strategies we created are being incorporated throughout the school,” Reynolds said. “Teachers are using a common language now – across social studies, ELA,

carpentry – beyond the content classes into career education. The work is transforming classrooms and everyone’s having a great reaction to the changes.”

Delaware’s focus on professional learning replaces the more traditional professional development model, which usually describes a one-shot, one-day event that gives educators information but seldom impacts student outcomes in the classroom. In 2012 Delaware adopted the Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards to support districts and charter schools as they implement high-quality, effective professional learning.

This definition of professional learning aligns to the Every Student Succeeds Act and supports educator training that is ongoing and data-driven. Professional learning is job-embedded and gives educators more opportunities to collaborate. The design is intensive and classroom-focused and has a direct impact on student achievement.

“Professional learning describes the type of educator instruction that all teachers deserve,” said Michael Watson, chief academic officer and associate secretary for the Delaware Department of Education. “By investing deeply in professional learning in Delaware, we continue to support our districts and charter schools as they work to promote the type of deep learning in students that extends well beyond the classroom.”

In Spring 2016, the department awarded 21 elementary, middle, and high schools across the state Reimagining Professional Learning grants to aid in their efforts to redesign professional learning around improved student achievement. Awards were based on each school’s integration of Delaware’s professional learning standards. Grants incorporated innovative, rigorous models of professional learning in English language arts (ELA), literacy and mathematics instructional strategies to strengthen teaching and student learning through leadership and educator effectiveness.

St. Georges professional learning redesign was supported by a \$30,000 Reimagining Professional Learning Grant. After analyzing internal assessment data and Smarter Assessment scores from the 2014-2015 school year, Reynolds and the teachers decided to hone in on improved writing and speaking/listening skills as a starting point for their work. On May 2, the team shared their innovative practices for professional learning at the state's Professional Learning Exhibition in Dover. The event showcased more than 150 educators from across the state, including Delaware's 21 Reimagining Professional Learning Innovative Grant winners, as they highlighted best practices for professional learning. The evening included table displays of professional learning artifacts, five-minute Ignite-like presentations, and educators engaging with their peers.

Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward, provided the keynote. Earlier in the day, Hirsh, DDOE and teams from national organizations focused on education visited St. Georges High School as well as Colonial School District's McCullough Middle School and Appoquinimink School District's Bunker Hill Elementary to celebrate the progress of professional learning in Delaware and to provide additional feedback on how to support redesigned professional learning in schools throughout the state. Last week, Hirsh also recognized Delaware nationally for its commitment to redesigned professional learning systems for Delaware educators. In a blog post shared by [EdWeek](#) Hirsh wrote, "...the Delaware Department of Education is demonstrating how a state education agency can be an enabler for substantive change. Their efforts are in stark contrast to the role of regulator or monitor, which is reflected in the work they have done as thought partners and critical friends to school-based practitioners. As a result, teachers and leaders view the Delaware Department of Education staff as valued colleagues."

"We are lucky to have so many outstanding educators focus on professional learning throughout the state – educators who strive not only for the growth of their students but for their professional growth and the growth of their colleagues as well," Secretary of Education Susan Bunting said. "That is imperative to shifting how teachers approach instructional practice in Delaware. This shift will not happen overnight, but it is starting thanks to bold thinking and strong supports."

For more information on professional learning in Delaware, visit
<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/reimaginingpl>