

## Partnering for Success

### How One SEA Is Building Capacity to Support Effective Educator Practice

In the fall of 2019, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) acknowledged its limited capacity to improve Professional Growth System (PGS) training. In conversations with the Region 7 Comprehensive Center (R7CC), the Director of Educator Talent Acquisition and Effectiveness made special note of her concern that her office, comprised of two staff members, had limited capacity to both make improvements needed to the system and meet the demand for PGS training for administrators across the state.

In 2022, after R7CC successfully supported MDE in redesigning and scaling PGS training, MDE leadership wondered—could a similar approach be taken to redesign and scale the outdated Orientation to School Leadership (OSL) training? The OSL training at that time was insufficient to meet the needs of new leaders across the state. Addressing both priorities would help MDE advance its work in achieving one of Mississippi’s Strategic Plan goals, which states that “Every School has Effective Teachers and Leaders.”

This story details how R7CC partnered with MDE to ensure the successful revision and implementation support for its PGS and then built upon its success and lessons learned to design OSL training modules for new leaders.

#### What is the PGS?

The PGS model sets forth the performance standards that teachers, administrators, and other educational personnel are expected to meet and describes the stepwise process used to implement the system. In addition, all administrators responsible for assessing educator performance are required to successfully complete training on the PGS.

Read more [here](#).

- 2018 (Pre-R7CC)** • A study of a PGS pilot conducted in 16 districts across the state reaffirmed the need to improve the system’s design and implementation.
- 2019** • MDE asked R7CC to provide assistance that would enable the Department to achieve a key goal of its strategic plan: **“Every school has effective teachers and leaders.”**
- 2020–2021** • R7CC supported MDE in using stakeholder survey data, facilitated a stakeholder work group to review training and make recommendations, and used best practices in adult learning to improve the PGS training.
- 2022–2023** • R7CC assisted MDE in building a statewide system of trainers through its Regional Education Service Agencies.
- 2023–2024** • Based on MDE’s request, R7CC is supporting a cross-office team of MDE leaders in the development of three OSL training modules for new leaders, using stakeholder input to inform the content and design of the training modules.

## Teaming Structure

A component that contributed to R7CC and MDE’s successful collaboration throughout the PGS work was the teaming structure created to define clear decision-making and communication processes. A cross-office team led the work, which helped team members make connections. A leadership team, including the State Superintendent and senior leadership, met regularly to make decisions about the work and allocate resources as needed.

Communication between the **State Implementation Team** and the **State Leadership Team** was essential to breaking down interoffice silos and disseminating information across the agency.

When needed, R7CC worked with MDE to form **working groups of key stakeholders** to engage with MDE in the PGS improvement process. This provided critical input and buy-in from the field.



*Transmission*  
State Implementation Team (SIT)



*Engine*  
State Leadership Team (SLT)



*Steering*  
Stakeholder Working Groups

The SLT has the authority and resources to power SIT initiatives. **Both teams are made up of MDE staff.**

## Gap Analysis

R7CC staff began the work by engaging state education agency staff in a gap analysis by analyzing the following:

- survey data collected by the Department during a pilot of the PGS;
- an assessment designed and facilitated by R7CC for State Implementation Team staff to examine the extent to which the PGS reflected evidence-based features and practices;
- a State Capacity Assessment in which the State Implementation Team and State Leadership Team members assessed the leadership, infrastructure, resources, communication, and engagement available to develop specific actions so they could monitor PGS improvement.

Data pointed to a severe lack of consistency in the quality of training offered throughout the state. State leadership agreed on two priorities to improve PGS training: **(1) quality and consistency and (2) accessibility**. MDE decided to create an asynchronous version of the PGS training and work with R7CC and Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) to provide consistent, high-quality in-person trainings throughout the state.

## Stakeholder Input

Recognizing that improvements to PGS training should be informed by those implementing and impacted by PGS, R7CC and MDE convened a representative group of 12 educational leaders and teachers from educator preparation programs and districts across the state. This group met six times to review the required PGS training, test a new asynchronous version of the course, and make both short- and long-term recommendations to improve the existing training. MDE immediately implemented short-term recommendations to both the in-person and asynchronous Canvas courses. The group also identified the core competencies of PGS trainers.

*As it relates to training, I still didn't get a clear understanding of expectations.*

*Ask more teachers what they need for the PGS to be beneficial for them.*

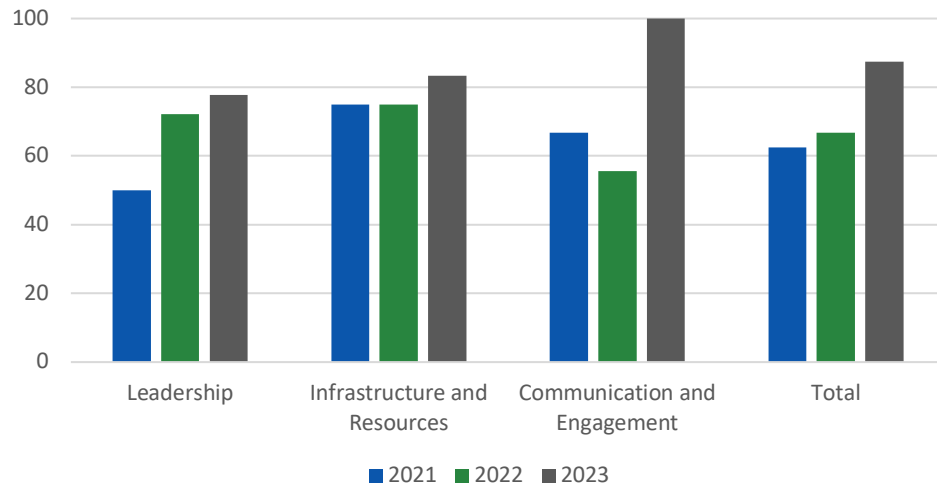
– Feedback from the Pilot District Survey

### Built a Statewide Training System

MDE and R7CC worked with the RESAs to increase the number of PGS trainings offered while ensuring consistency in the training quality. R7CC and MDE staff co-developed a recruitment, selection, and onboarding toolkit based on the essential competencies identified by the workgroup. R7CC and MDE staff co-created detailed training materials, including facilitator guides and slides, which MDE staff walked through during onboarding. In addition, R7CC worked with Department staff to develop a pre- and post-assessment and a set of look-fors that MDE could use to continuously monitor the training quality. This collaborative, strategic approach resulted in more educators accessing PGS training, and the PGS training was of more consistent quality.

Due to the collaboration between MDE, RESAs, and R7CC, twice as many educators statewide were able to access trainings in the first four months of the new PGS trainings, and almost all participants found them to be of high quality and useful. The success of the communication and engagement aspects of this work among MDE staff is evidenced by State Capacity Assessment results from 2023, which show an increase from 55.6% in 2022 to 100% in 2023 (Table 1).

**Table 1. State Capacity Assessment Results Across Scales and Total (2021–2023)**



### Training Modules for New School Leaders

Given the successful implementation and scale up of the PGS training, MDE asked R7CC to support the design and scale up of OSL training modules for new school leaders. Three teams of MDE leaders were identified to work with R7CC—one for the development of a module on Strengthening Instruction, one for Strengthening Teams, and one for Strengthening Schools. R7CC is supporting each of these teams in designing high-quality, 12-hour/2-day training modules. As part of this work, R7CC will help MDE to adapt the PGS trainer selection and onboarding process and tools to create a statewide system of trainers for the three OSL modules. For each training module, there will be a detailed facilitator guide; a recruitment, selection, and onboarding toolkit; and pre- and post-assessments. Updates regarding this work will be available on our website [here](#).

State Capacity Assessment results from 2021 to 2023 indicate MDE’s increased capacity in leadership, infrastructure and resources, communication and engagement, as well as an overall increase in capacity to implement effective practices that lead to improved student outcomes.



Strengthening Instruction



Strengthening Teams



Strengthening Schools