Communities of Practice Program Requirements and Guidelines

This document covers all the requirements, guidelines, vision, support, and background in depth for the Communities of Practice Program. For more resources, check out our Resources page.

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The School Quality Improvement System is designed with the recognition that the federal expectations for meeting students’ needs have been too narrow for too long. LEAs have too often been chasing success in a system that does not define success in a comprehensive or rigorous way. The LEAs participating in the School Quality Improvement System are rejecting this narrow focus and accept the radical ideal that true success for all students can only be achieved through a holistic approach. It is underpinned by a moral imperative to help all students succeed, and is driven by a commitment to collaborate through communities of practice, school pairings and shared/mutual accountability. It includes annual expectations for progress as well as absolute levels of performance and growth. (CORE Waiver, p. 72)

“Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this. Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in communities of practice and in teams and business units. Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects. Communities are not limited by formal structures: they create connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries” (CORE Waiver, p. 136)

Requirements

Below are the required activities and commitments for schools participating in communities of practice:

Two year plan based upon data analysis and needs assessment:
Focus schools will use data, in addition to consultation with school advisory groups, to undergo a self-review and needs assessment to inform the creation of a two-year plan.

Form School Site Councils:
Schools in California have advisory groups, such as School Site Councils, that include teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders. If a school does not have such a group, the school would be required to form one as part of this waiver effort

PDSA cycles:
Communities of practice participants engage in plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycles, occurring quarterly with each Focus and “Other Support” school participating in at least three full cycles annually. And, each participating school will engage in at least one full COP cycle in the first semester of the first year of designation.

Continuous Documentation and Evidence Collection:
Throughout the intervention timeline, districts will aggregate and report out comments and feedback from participating schools on specific interventions, teaching methodologies, and/or trainings that worked well, and those that did not. This data will be aggregated and best practices shared among CORE districts.

Reporting back to School Site Councils:
Following each COP gathering, all schools will be responsible for reporting key learnings and feedback gathered to their School Site Councils (as defined by CA Ed Code and documented in the Single School Plan for Student Achievement, which is annual approved by LEA
superintendent and school board). Schools will then work in partnership with their School Site or Advisory Councils to review and revise improvement plans as necessary, and implement reform strategies for the remainder of the quarter before returning back to the larger COP with data to determine effectiveness and scalability.

**Review performance and evaluate outcomes:**
At the end of each school year, LEAs will be responsible for reviewing school performance on the School Quality Improvement Index to ensure that COPs are resulting in improved student outcomes.

**Link interventions and data analysis into School Improvement Plans:**
Participating schools will be expected to link the interventions, shared learning and data analysis into their School Improvement plans (e.g., problems of practice, key learnings, scaled interventions).

### Additional Guidelines

The following offers a set of guidelines for participating schools and facilitators of Communities of Practice. These are guidelines and not mandates. That said, Communities of Practice or schools that choose to operate outside of the guidelines are encouraged to do so with a clear rationale for their approach in terms how their chosen deviation(s) from the guidelines will better help them improve student outcomes.

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<tr>
<th>Features of a CORE's CoP</th>
<th>Guidelines</th>
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| **Problem of Practice**  | Each participating school is encouraged to identify a problem of practice according to the following: Rooted in a needs assessment that includes analysis of quantitative data (e.g., metrics from the School Quality Improvement Index, district assessment data, student work) and qualitative evidence (e.g., artifacts of classroom or school practice, observations of classroom or school practice, interviews of key stakeholders)  
Addresses one or more metrics from School Quality Improvement Index  
Identifies an aspect of classroom practice as part of the problem statement  
For Focus schools, identifies (a) subgroup(s) as part of the problem statement* |
| **Forming CoPs**          | Each Community of Practice should be formed around a commonality in the participating schools’ problems of practice, which could include such elements as a metric, a particular subgroup, a particular intervention strategy, and/or some other aspect of the problem of practice.  
*COP focus-areas will be based on common themes or problems of practice (POP) that emerge in annual School Quality Improvement Index scores, or through LEA collected feedback from schools and other key stakeholders.* (CORE Waiver, p. 136) |
| **CoP School Level**      | CoPs should generally be organized by school level (ES, MS or HS), though some may not be. |
We generally recommend the following composition for each Community:

- **Two to four school teams**
- **Four to seven participants per school team** (or more if warranted) positioned to directly address the problem of practice

A combination of staff are needed, potentially including teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, school administrators, district administrators, and the like. The success of a CoP is dependent upon various factors including the structure of the group.

While each school’s CoP team may be different, we recommend that each school’s CoP team include:

- teachers implementing the intervention or strategy;
- peer teachers, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, or teachers on special assignment to act as observers of the intervention or strategy;
- a note taker to capture and chronicle activities; and
- a site-based decision maker.

**At least one dedicated facilitator**

The facilitator will design and implement activities to build relationships within the CoP, and will design, adopt or adapt protocols and tools to support each step of the PDSA cycle.

**Intra-District or Inter-District CoPs**

Most CoPs will be organized within Districts. Districts may choose to collaborate on a CoP. CORE will offer one CoP in each region, where feasible/appropriate.

The goal of CORE CoPs is for educators to support and learn from one another. While we anticipate that most CoPs will be organized within districts (with the support of CORE staff), if a district believes partnering with another district with a common focus area is beneficial to the success of their CoP, then CORE will work with the CoP to provide the support needed.

CORE will also work with each region (Bay Area, Central Valley, Southern California) to identify one topic (subject matter + targeted subgroup + school level) to organize an inter-district CoP around (where feasible/appropriate).

**PDSA Cycle**

PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) refers to a four-step improvement cycle for organizing and managing continuous improvement. It is a strategy used to encourage groups to define goals, monitor progress, and develop rapid changes when desired results are not achieved. Each CoP will engage in three PDSA cycles in a school year.

**PDSA Cycle: Plan**

During the “plan” portion of the PDSA, participating schools should engage in the following:

- **PoP**: Define/refine the problem of practice
- **Shared Learning**: Engaged in shared learning (looking out) to explore possible solutions/strategies to address the problem of practice (e.g., book/article study, sharing promising practices, observing at another school, engaging experts)
- **Strategy/Intervention to test**: Define the intervention or strategy that each school team will be testing out in the “Do” portion of the cycle
- **Evidence plan**: Decide on what (e.g., in terms of adult practices and student impact) and how evidence (e.g., artifacts, observation, interventions, assessment data, student work, interviews) will be collected during the “Do” portion of the cycle so that the team will be able to effectively “study” successes, challenges, etc. of the intervention or strategy and then make decisions as to how to move forward in the “Act” portion of the cycle.

**PDSA Cycle: Do**

During the “do” portion of the PDSA cycle, school teams implement the intervention or strategy they decided to test during the “plan” step, and collect evidence.

We encourage school teams to meet at least three times during the “do” portion of the cycle:

- One meeting to confirm “game plan” (who, what, where, when, why) for the implementing and collecting evidence on the chosen strategy or intervention
- One mid-stream status check
- One end of cycle session to organize data collected to participate in the “study” work

**PDSA Cycle: Study**

During the “study” part of the cycle, teams review and reflect on the implementation of their intervention or strategy. They review evidence and share learnings with colleagues in their Communities of Practice.

**PDSA Cycle: Act**

During the “act” part of the cycle, school teams decide what to start doing, stop doing, keep doing, scale, etc. The “act” portion of the cycle will directly inform the “plan” for the next cycle, where teams may decide to implement the same strategy with some refinements, to scale the same strategy, or to try a different strategy.
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<th>CoP Facilitator Support</th>
<th>All CoP Facilitators will participate in a regional CoP for facilitators</th>
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<td>There will be a “Community of Practice” for CoP facilitators in each region facilitated by the CORE School Support Team. In August or September, the facilitators will participate in a one-day community building and preparation session. In November, February, and early May, facilitators will participate in one day check-in and peer learning sessions.</td>
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| Professional Learning and Support for CoPs | Participants may participate in a number of sessions and activities designed to support the CORE CoP effort. CORE will support CoPs with at least three web-based professional learning series regarding select topics most common to the CORE CoPs (e.g., ELA + secondary + English Learners). Participation in virtual sessions will be voluntary for CoP members and will be open to any CORE district educators. The CORE School Support Team will provide vetted research summaries aligned to the CoP focus areas, as well as tools, instrument and materials to support the work of CoPs. |

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**Related Materials**

**Expectations of Communities of Practice Facilitators**

This document covers the expectations of community of practice facilitators in depth, including the vision, goals, objectives, responsibilities, and support covered. For more resources, check out Facilitator Resources.

*View Info >*