

Instructional Communities of Practice: FAQ Sheet

What does an RUSD instructional community of practice look like?

An instructional community of practice in RUSD is a group of teachers, coaches and administrators who are committed to learning from and with each other in mutual inquiry around a differentiated literacy practice. This peer-based inquiry assumes that the answers to our most difficult questions exist within the community or can be found together. Though communities of practice are a natural way that people learn, organizations can intentionally support the emergence and development of communities of practice.

When and how often do we meet?

Rhythm and regularity support community building and sustained inquiry in a community of practice. They provide the opportunity for practitioners to reflect on practice and deepen inquiry within the context of practitioners' daily work. As you collectively create your learning plan, you will agree on the frequency and duration of your meetings keeping in mind the need to maintain the energy and vitality of your community's conversations, learning and reflection. Some groups may wish to meet twice a month for 2 hours each time; others may meet every 3-4 weeks for 3 hours. As a supported community of practice, you will be expected to meet regularly on your own time and have a plan that identifies meeting times and durations. The Community of Practice Café, located in room D-5 at Shelyn Elementary will be available for meeting space as needed.

Each community of practice will be given 2 sub-days for whole days of learning. These days will be based on availability in the district's sub calendar. Your community of practice should plan carefully to optimize your learning together and full participation is expected. Each member will be expected to acquire his/her own substitute. The Ball Liaison office will not be arranging substitutes.

Each community of practice is expected to attend two Literacy Network days (December 7, 2009 and March 1, 2010) from 4:00-7:00pm. These will be organized as practice fairs in which diverse communities of practice will share their practice and learning. This is also an opportunity for sharing across communities of practice and reflection on themes and patterns in our mutual work. Charters will also be accepted (new and renewals) at this time. The Literacy Network is open to all district staff, however, only current members of a community of practice (i.e. those with charters) will be paid for attending these two events. You will receive more information on how to prepare for these practice fairs in the fall.

How big can a community of practice be?

The size of a particular community of practice is small enough to support full participation and large enough to access diverse perspectives. You will be asked to consider how your group size facilitates identifying a common meeting time and allows all members to have active voice and participation. *We suggest* that groups have a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 12. Groups larger than 12 may be asked to consider breaking into smaller inquiry groups and those with less than 5 to recruit other members. These are *community* inquiry groups and, therefore, your decision about group size should reflect an intention to create and support ongoing collaboration, dialogue, and individual meaning making.

How do we become a supported community of practice?

Once you have a group of people who are interested in engaging in deep inquiry together, you can complete a charter for review at the beginning of the year and at each trimester. The community of practice charter identifies the practice, inquiry question(s), members and learning plan of the community of practice. Once completed and reviewed, a community of practice becomes a “supported” community of practice and receives funds for professional materials, subs for 2 full learning days, and access to a support team. New charters are accepted at the beginning of the year and at each trimester. Charters need to be renewed each trimester. Deadlines for charter review in the 2009-2010 school year are at the end of August, December 9, and March 3. Support is available to develop your charter.

What are the roles and responsibilities of participants in a community of practice?

Each community of practice needs one contact person and one communication person for the year. The contact person is responsible for convening the group and serves as contact to other people in the Literacy Network and the CoP support team. The communication person is responsible for updating group information on the CoP web platform (time and place of meetings, group learning) attending one day of training, and assuring other members know how to contribute to online activity.

What support is available to the communities of practice?

Each community of practice will receive \$150 per person per year. This amount will be prorated for new charters in Dec. and March. The use of funds must be mutually agreed upon by all members of the community. The process for handling receipts is being planned. Funds may be used for professional development materials such as books, DVDs, technology and other professional development needs such as professional memberships.

A CoP support team is being developed to coach and provide assistance in building community and developing inquiry into practice; they may also attend some regular meetings and your learning days. In addition, every month there will be a number of after-school workshops available on topics such as: creating community; protocols for collecting, analyzing and discussing student data; strategies for group facilitation; tools to aid in group conversation. These are voluntary learning times (*Drop in Learning Café's*); topics will be announced in advance and will be developed based upon suggestions from or needs identified by CoP's.

ANNOUNCING!

The Community of Practice Café will soon be open!

We will be adding a new addition to the Ball PARC office (D-6), which will be located next door in room D-5 Shelyn Elementary School – *The Community of Practice Café*. Thank you Shelyn!

The Café will be available to you as a meeting place and we plan to have Wednesday and Thursday afternoons from 3:00-5:00pm set aside to host community learning. You can have your regular CoP meetings there and connect with other CoPs across the district!

Books and DVDs and support team members will be available to you as well.