



AASA/ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant 2020-21
State Communities of Practice (AASA-SCoP)

Executive Summary

Highlights of AASA/Gates State SCoP Initiative

Funded through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the AASA State Communities of Practice (AASA-SCoP) initiative will enhance state based AASA associations to “optimize, expand, and formalize their existing communities of practice.” AASA will serve as the central coordinator for this initiative, facilitating connections within and among five AASA state associations to share collective insights, recommendations, and action plans related to leading education during this challenging and unprecedented time in our nation’s history.

A major focus of the AASA State Communities of Practice initiative will be to enhance communication, collaboration, and strategic planning involving the identification and resolution of current and emerging problems of practice, including responses to unanticipated issues and crises facing educators today. Participating association members will contribute to the development of and access to a range of electronic resources related to problems of practice, including issues of equity and disproportionality revealed by the recent pandemic. “Points of Light” will be identified and showcased, highlighting district- and school-based responses to the problems identified. AASA will serve as the “hub” with affiliate state associations in five states for collaboration and communication.

The long-range goal of this grant-funded initiative is to enhance Communities of Practice involving five AASA state associations in Florida, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas. The states were selected in collaboration with the Gates Foundation team. AASA SCoP initiative will develop and sustain a comprehensive process for promoting connections and professional learning among participating districts, led by AASA state affiliates. Participants will engage in regular virtual meetings within states and across states.

Sessions will include discussions involving the five affiliates, presentations by national thought leader practitioners, sharing of resources and action plans, virtual site visits, and systematic check-in and coaching opportunities for members of AASA state affiliate associations. Additionally, AASA state affiliate associations will have opportunities to showcase their members’ “success stories” related to addressing problems of practice they are experiencing.

Project Outcomes

1. Build the capacity of five AASA state affiliate associations to optimize, expand, and formalize existing communities of practice to support more rapid collaboration and communication for district superintendents as they respond to challenges and related problems of practice.

2. Expand the national knowledge base concerning how educational communities of practice can effectively and efficiently address problems of practice, including long-range impact of crises and trauma that impact the health, safety, and social-emotional well-being of students, staff, and parents.
3. Develop replicable electronic resources that can be used by educational leaders to address issues revealed through the Community of Practice (CoP) discussions, including equity and disproportionality issues that have been highlighted in the global pandemic. Resources will be shared, including “Points of Light” to showcase exemplary AASA affiliated state associations, districts, and schools.

Benefits to Participating AASA State Associations

Benefits to participating AASA state affiliate association members will include opportunities to: (1) share insights, recommendations, achievements, and accomplishments related to communities of practice; (2) learn from other Superintendents across the five states about their work involving the resolution of problems of practice using collaborative teams and partnerships; (3) contribute to the development of a range of electronic “Points of Light” resources involving state, district, and state based responses to challenges and trauma.

A major focus of this initiative will be to synthesize and share collective insights, recommendations, and action plans, including showcasing and elevating bright spots to national attention. An anticipated by-product of the Communities of Practice includes strategies in change management, crisis resolution, and leading through uncertainty. Methods for enhancing Communities of Practice include networking, resource development and distribution, mentoring, and collaboration.

This grant will serve to develop a set of recommendations based on learnings from the five state AASA affiliates about what it takes to successfully run Communities of Practice at state, regional, and district levels. AASA will disseminate findings through its network of state affiliates and school district leaders. Additionally, the collective group of state affiliate leaders will explore techniques, strategies, and monitoring processes to determine the effectiveness and impact of Communities of Practice, including showcasing best practices in an AASA Community of Practice Toolkit.

Project Timeline

Representative outcomes include the following:

1. In October 2020, identify coalition key leaders and confirm interest in participating.
2. In November 2020, host an initial discussion with AASA state association leaders to formulate plans for implementation and set dates for quarterly meetings.
3. In December, begin to develop a clearing house of shared practices and resources.
4. In early 2021, begin quarterly publication of synthesis reports highlighting AASA Community of Practice (AASA-SCoP) initiative insights, action steps, and research related to addressing identified problems.

5. By November 2021, publish summative reports by disseminating through the AASA website, AASA professional learning programs, and AASA leadership network cohorts.
6. Throughout the grant cycle, provide participating association members tools and resources to monitor members' levels of engagement with communities of practices strategies and processes.
7. Publish case studies showcasing "bright spots" and exemplary practices identified by AASA state associations, highlighting how their members are addressing problems of practice involving health, safety, and social-emotional learning needs among students, staff, and families.