

# CONNECTIONS

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## *In this issue...*

Partner Fishbowl: A Structure to Start and Deepen the Conversation

Book Review: *Pathways*

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools: Collaborating for Students' Success

Book Review: *Because of the Kids*

Compassion: A Core Value of Skilled Facilitation - Insights from *The Skilled Facilitator*

Breaking the Rules

Now What? How Our Experiences at the Winter Meeting Continue to Change Our Practice

Winter Meeting Reflections

Mastbaum High School Students Reflect on Winter Meeting Internship

Our World Café

NSRF Principals' Seminar & Upcoming Events

## Report from the Directors

Steve Bonchek, Daniel Baron & Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Directors

We recently welcomed Hawaii as our 27<sup>th</sup> NSRF Center of Activity. Just what, you may be asking yourself, is an NSRF Center of Activity, and how does one go about "becoming" a center? Hawaii's story might be illustrative, as it took one road to becoming a formal center.

First, a little history ... Back in June of 2000, a group of about twenty NSRF National Facilitators met in Providence to hammer out NSRF's first governance and organizational structure. There was talk of forming traditional regional NSRF Centers – that is, organizations with offices, phones, administrative assistants and 501c3 nonprofit status. There was also talk of a virtual organization – NSRF as a loosely linked network of like-minded organizations and individuals who came together in whatever configurations made sense for that particular part of the country. In the end, the people at the meeting opted for an organizational structure somewhere in between traditional and virtual, with particular attention paid to the local contexts of the people who were doing NSRF work. The people at this meeting wrote:

Centers of Activity can include individuals, schools, and affiliated organizations who are engaged in the work of NSRF. Centers of Activity convene NSRF-related meetings and seminars, provide a conduit for local and national communication, and have associated with them at least one NSRF National Facilitator who offers CFG coaches' and/or principals' training. NSRF is not a center-based organization, regional or otherwise. We have quite deliberately chosen the terminology "Centers of



Activity" to describe our work nationally. We neither encourage nor discourage "bricks and mortar" centers with full-time employees - that is up to people to determine locally. We envision that there will be many organizations that are Centers of Activity, as well as clusters of people regionally who maintain contact with each other and who both support and hold each other accountable for high-quality work.

Since then, we have decided as an organization that to be an NSRF Center of Activity, someone from the location needs to attend the Centers Council meeting each year, in order to:

1. review organizational vision and processes
2. raise important issues
3. give input on organizational and program issues
4. establish "clusters of interest" and ad hoc task forces for on-going work together across Centers of Activity

In addition, at least one national facilitator from each Center of Activity must attend the yearly National Facilitators' meeting.

*(continued on page 14)*

## Winter Meeting...

(continued from page 10)

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Certainly there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of balance and willful election ... Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment." The 2004 NSRF Winter Meeting was a "journey through mud to magic" (to paraphrase my storytelling protocol partner) which placed me back in the middle of the stream of my life, impelling me toward truth and right, if not perfect contentment. ■

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## Our World Café

(continued from page 12)

I am still thinking about the question, "What does equity look like?" Without open conversation, how will we get there? We won't. We will continue as an institution to tell ourselves we are reaching all students when in fact the data shows something very different. When every student is empowered to take control of their learning and all students see themselves as a vital connection to the world, then we will begin the road toward real reform. Until then, the best we can do is pretend and congratulate ourselves for thinking we are doing the right thing, instead of actually doing the right thing. It is not easy, but it is critical to have that conversation. CFGs give voice to progress and provide a check on what does and does not work. They bring voice to the table where no voice existed. World Café is not a panacea, but it is a bridge to the table where conversations about where to go begin. ■

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## Report from the Directors

(continued from page 1)

This year, the National Facilitators' Meeting took place in Chicago in May. Conversations among the National Facilitators at this meeting, as well as among Center of Activity contacts at the annual Winter Meeting in January, are just two ways that leaders in the organization learn with and from each other, thus supporting the growth and development of NSRF work nationally.

Hawaii was one of those parts of the country that - up until this spring - did not have a formal way to participate in the decision making of NSRF, or to learn with people in NSRF from other parts of the country. There were people interested in pursuing CFG work, but since Hawaii didn't have any NSRF National Facilitators, there was not a Center of Activity to support the work or to facilitate CFG Coaches Seminars. Educators in Hawaii had to either go to the mainland for their CFG Coaches' seminars, or had to fly NSRF National Facilitators to Hawaii.

So, in February, two NSRF National Facilitators from the mainland and three CFG Coaches from Hawaii co-planned and co-facilitated a two-day Introduction to CFGs for 24 participants from Hawaiian schools. Following the two-day introduction, these CFG coaches from Hawaii were sponsored by an NSRF National Facilitator in Los Angeles, and went to California to co-facilitate a full five-day CFG coaches seminar with her.

Hawaii now has two NSRF National Facilitators, hopes to offer CFG coaches seminars with follow-up, and is our newest NSRF Center of Activity. One of the interesting things about Hawaii's Center of Activity is that it has involved public and charter schools, as well as independent schools, from its inception. Intentionally bringing together these diverse strands of educators is consistent with Hawaii's cultural value of interdependence, and other Centers of Activity will hopefully be able to learn from their experience and work together.

NSRF's National Center provides some direct support to individual CFG coaches, but the bulk of the National Center's work is focused on supporting local Centers of Activity and their National Facilitators. The NSRF National Facilitators in the Hawaii Center of Activity are not bringing national projects to their local community, but are instead using ideas, insights and tools gleaned from their work with the work of others in NSRF's national network to inform their local work and context. That is what building capacity is all about.

From Hawaii to Maine, to Washington and Florida, NSRF Centers of Activity are providing the necessary support to help educators move away from their previously isolated practice toward the development of collaborative learning communities. The ultimate goal? To support every child in developing his or her full capacity as a person, as a learner, and as a responsible citizen. ■

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