

Center of Activity Report: Houston

Donna Reid, Texas

Houston A+ staff continues to provide the 40-hour new coach training seminar. During the 2007-2008 year, Houston A+ CFG National Facilitators trained approximately 300 teachers and administrators.

Over the course of the 2007-2008 school year, program coordinators Tim Martindell and Michael Webster trained 52 school improvement specialists in Spring Branch ISD.

Tim Martindell and CFG consultant Donna Reid provided training in facilitative leadership using the CFG model for 86 Goose Creek Consolidated School District leaders. The initial cohort was comprised of a 26-member leadership team including Superintendent Barbara Sultis. Through its Houston A+ replication grant, Goose Creek trained an additional 60 elementary and middle school leaders to build critical mass within the district for the CFG work. Denton plans to become a center of activity in North Texas.

Using funds from a replication grant, CFG consultant Michaelann Kelley facilitated CFG training for 35 staff members of Aldine ISD's Eisenhower High School in January. This brings the number of trained coaches on the campus to 40 and is reinvigorating the teachers as they focus on examining student work and refining teacher practice, as well as building the capacity of teacher leaders. Local National Facilitator Mary Matthews used funds from a similar grant to train 10 new coaches in Alief ISD.

Houston A+ coordinator Tim Martindell and consultants Donna Reid and Mary Matthews were joined by eight Houston area educators at the National School Reform Faculty winter meeting held in Tampa, Florida, December 12-15. Tim, Donna, and Mary each designed and facilitated a 15-hour home group session, as well as modeled CFG facilitative leadership practice to apprentice facilitators from the Florida region of NSRF. Participant reflections from the home groups noted the rigor and depth brought to the discussion by the Houston area national facilitators.

Teachers and administrators continue to attend trainings and Donna Reid is providing follow-up support for CFG trainers with a biweekly electronic newsletter. This newsletter highlights CFG work in the Houston area, spotlights a trainer's practice, and provides tips for implementing protocols. The newsletter is linked to the Houston A+ Challenge website, houstonannen-berg.org.



Critical Friends Group as Research Team Grant

CFGs have become forums for teacher research through two-year grants funded by Houston A+. Critical Friends Group As Research Team (CART) provides ten grants that foster inquiries about teaching and learning by teachers and administrators; CART enables school teams to improve their practice and advance knowledge and theory. Each team is led by a trained CFG coach. Three action labs were held to discuss evidence and share the progress of the grantees as they conducted and documented their research.

CART Grant recipients and work to date include:

- Anderson Academy, Aldine ISD: Improving Arts-Based Approaches in Education: Learning from Self and Others
- KIPP Academy Sharpstown College Prep: Vision of Student and Teacher Excellence
- Stovall Academy, Aldine ISD: Improving Kindergarten Reading Fluency through the Use of Poetry
- Challenge Early College High School, Houston ISD: Building Teacher Collaborative Structures to Improve Student Learning and Self-Efficacy.
- Houston Academy, Aldine ISD: Revisiting, Revising, and Reflecting on the Houston Academy STARS (curriculum) Units of Study.
- PACE (Program of Accelerated Education), Humble ISD: Student Connectivity through Personalized Learning
- Faculty Academy, University of Houston (Main, Downtown, and Clear Lake) and Sam Houston State University: Faculty Academy Collaboration through Learning and Leading.
- Eisenhower High School, Aldine ISD: Changing the Context and Content of Collegial Conversations
- Cross-District CFG, Aldine, Alief, Houston ISD's: Changes in Latitude - Changes in Attitude
- Master Reading Teacher CFG, Houston ISD: Implementing Reader's Theater as a Group of Master Reading Teachers. *(continued on page 15)*

continuing CFG coaches' training. Every fall and spring we host network meetings for educators engaged in CFG work. Our network now consists of 114 educators, at least 44 of whom have attended more than one continuing coach institute or meeting following their initial training. The network includes 81 teachers, 20 school administrators, three university-based educators, and 10 educators who hold other school and district roles. All told, the educators of the network represent 36 schools in 11 districts and five states, although primarily Texas.

We are deeply committed to active participation in the larger national organization. Grant funds secured through Trinity's Department of Education have enabled the Center to financially support a delegation of San Antonio educators to attend Winter Meeting for the past seven years. Those educators then help plan and facilitate the annual local Winter Meeting to share national meeting concepts with area teachers and administrators.

In addition to sending teams of educators to Winter Meetings, Center members have played a leadership role at such national events. Beyond their ongoing participation in CFGs in local schools, current Center facilitators have served as facilitators and Critical Friends at Winter Meetings and share responsibility for attending the annual Facilitator and Center Meetings. Moreover, Pat and Angela have presented research findings on the use of protocols to support preservice teachers' preparation at NSRF's annual Research Forum and the American Educational Research Association annual meetings. Angela serves on the Accountability Council, and Ileana is a member of the Houston Winter Meeting Planning Team. Thus we support local coaches, engage in the work alongside our CFG colleagues, actively participate in NSRF nationally, and conduct scholarship around our CFG work.

Our Center is excited about the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead for not only moving our work forward locally but nationally as well. In addition to upcoming local events like our Fall Gathering, where we will use a text-based protocol to explore "Undermining Democracy" by Deborah Meier, we look forward to providing financial support to a dozen area educators to attend this year's Winter Meeting. Moreover, Angela and Pat continue to write about their CFG work, sharing it with researcher and practitioner audiences. We also want to work closely with our colleagues across the country in strengthening the national organization as

we clarify and work to align our values and practices. ■

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Finally, our Center has been instrumental in the award and implementation of three Teacher as Researcher (TAR) grants. These grants are an outgrowth of CFGs and have been extended for a third year at \$5,000 each, with the specific charge of documenting the results for academic publication. These research teams met together monthly over the past year. Their joint chapter on lessons learned about the connection between teacher inquiry and student achievement in school reform have been submitted to the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) 2008 yearbook (in press). ■

*For more information about any of these grants
or our work in schools, contact Donna Reid
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might be new and different protocols. Aligned with the A+ leadership initiatives, our CFG work is led by a very diverse group of Houston area National Facilitators and apprentices. Our long-term strategy is to have the local CFG leadership mirror Houston community.

We're also looking at how CFGs reach out: how does this work go beyond the school group? So we might be looking at how to design CFGs for community members. For example, we trained a group of students this summer during our CFG New Coach Seminar.

So there are a lot of things coming up. Tell me about how CFG practices have transformed you.

For me personally, I think I've learned to listen and ask much better questions. ■

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