

What is Real Support from Principals?

Nancy Mohr, New York

The Research Bulletin produced by Dunne, Nave and Lewis in December 2000 and distributed by Phi Delta Kappa says it clearly: "Principals who failed to actively support the work of CFGs were the greatest hindrances to their success." The Bulletin (<http://pdkintl.org/edres/resbul28.htm>) goes on to describe the commitment which was expected "...to support the CFG by providing time during the school day for the group to meet and by providing substitute teachers to cover classrooms when CFG teachers participated in peer observations."

The message is clear—principals' support for teacher learning is critical.

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money, some cookies, some moral and spiritual support.

Level II — They can be cheerleaders, voicing their support of the work of the CFG. They can create



opportunities for celebration and highlight the learning and changes in practice that are taking place.

Level III — They can form their own CFG, and/or attend a Facilitators Training Series — participating in the

their own work, they can transform their staff meetings into democratic, enjoyable events. The conversations with parents are no longer about raising money.

Level V—They can, along with the rest of their school community discover that all of the strategies and protocols which are working so well for the grown-ups are the best thing that could happen in classrooms and so they begin to join in and initiate intervisitations, going along with teachers, looking at CFG-type practices that kids are doing — text-based dialogue, peer editing consultancies, etc. They all debrief these visits together, deepening the level of work in every classroom.

At this point, the principal will have truly transformed teaching and learning throughout the school, and the

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It's unlikely that principals want to be unsupportive of teachers and their learning—but the support that principals provide can take on different shapes and forms. As we all become more sophisticated, we see ways in which principals are an integral part of the process, not impediments to be worked around.

So, what are the levels of support that principals can provide?

Level I — They can start, at the least, by doing that which is described above — getting out of the way, not making it hard for teachers to meet, not scheduling conflicting meetings and not patronizing the work of the CFG. They can even provide a little

work themselves. They may even be in a CFG along with teachers — something which most people who try it report can work quite well, and may be one of the best ways indeed of flattening hierarchies — helping everyone get past her or his discomfort with "mixing" roles.

Level IV — They can, after attending their own Facilitators Training Series, become facilitative leaders themselves. They can start using protocols and tools which make *all* of their meetings more meaningful and better use of time, they can start to convene groups all over the school which look at student and professional work, they can seek feedback on

school community will be pretty clear that without this leadership focus and support the job would have been a lot harder and would probably have taken a long, long time, if ever, to reach this level of true synergy and joy and powerful learning for all of its members. And the principal will have found a group of incredible allies who make the work more coherent and the life of the principal less separate and lonely. □

You can contact Nancy Mohr at <nanmohr@rcn.com>

