The past four years have seen tremendous growth in the scope of NSRF’s work. What started as a program that focused on the professional development of K-12 teachers and principals has expanded to include post-secondary institutions, district-wide initiatives, and long-term partnerships with school reform organizations.

Since its inception, NSRF has aspired to be a democratic learning community, a community that is - in the words of one of NSRF’s long-time schools - committed to relationships based on respect, trust, and courage. In 2000-2001, as NSRF moved from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to the Harmony Education Center, we agreed on a new mission statement:

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

Our commitment to this mission has included diversifying the leadership of NSRF so it more closely resembles the diversity of our constituency - that is, the children in the schools where NSRF has a presence. By leadership, we mean our national project “point people,” national task force and planning committee members, national NSRF facilitators, and perhaps most important, the Co-Directors of NSRF.

So on behalf of NSRF’s National Center and its Accountability Council - I am delighted to announce that Debbi Laidley has accepted a position as Co-Director of the National School Reform Faculty, effective September 1, 2004. Debbi has been with the UCLA School Management Program since 1996, where she coordinates the Critical Friends Groups New Coaches Seminars. A graduate of Mount St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles with a master’s degree in educational administration, Debbi began her career as a teacher in 1978 and has taught English, English as a second language, student leadership and journalism in grades 7-12. In addition to her ongoing position with the UCLA School Management Program, Debbi is a secondary literacy specialist with the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Debbi has served on NSRF’s Accountability Council since its inception in 2003, and is an active NSRF national facilitator, having led and participated in numerous national and local NSRF events. She has coordinated CFG Coaches Seminars for the Southern California area, assisting schools and districts with developing professional learning communities, developing the skills and building the capacity of the CFG coaches there, and supporting efforts to sustain CFG and related school wide reforms. Those who know her all (continued on page 13)
Into the Light - Reflections from a New Coach

John Pieper, Wisconsin

Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney’s American Teacher Awards, saluting outstanding members of the teaching profession. Specifically, the program honors those teachers whose approach eschews creativity in teaching and who inspire a joy of learning in their students. In 2003 John Pieper was one of 30 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG coaches training was one of the benefits included with this special recognition.

In our next three issues we are going to follow John’s journey as a new CFG coach.

I n the midst of a magical Disney experience, I found myself facing an element of darkness. It wasn’t a literal darkness, but rather that unsettling feeling you get when you are about to face a totally new situation that you know absolutely nothing about. Fortunately, I would not be facing this adventure alone. A collection of equally bewildered teachers, all relative strangers, assembled in a large hall. There was an air of mystery and anticipation. We were to receive guidance and training in something called Critical Friends Groups. Little did I know that this training would start me on an incredible journey.

Stephen Spring and Steven Sruill were the Zen-like guides who would lead us through this personal and professional transformation. They were totally in control. I remember being very impressed with how effortlessly they moved us from one concept or activity to another. They instilled a sense of confidence in us as we took the time to practice these things called protocols. Not only was I given the opportunity to look far and wide, but also to see things from a new perspective. We were ready to be challenged.

The group of relative strangers connected in an amazing way. As a new CFG coach I was chomping at the bit to gather a team of recruits and lead them into meaningful CFG work. There was student work to be tuned, articles to be shared, norms to be implemented and reflections to be written. But alas, by the time I became a “certified” CFG coach, it was too late in the year to organize a real CFG. I had to be content to scheme and dream. My enthusiasm continued throughout the summer. The other portion of my action plan was also a reflection of my idealistic thinking. My vision was to carry this work beyond my school to as far as I could take it.

The new school year has started and I will begin the implementation of my plan within the next week. We have often used the lighthouse as a symbol for learning at our school. As I reflect on my CFG training, that symbolism takes on new meaning. Education can be a storm tossed sea. We have many at risk students who need to be beckoned into the safety and calm of our welcoming harbor. We offer the light of knowledge. How smooth the sailing will be if my light is passed on to those around me. It is my time to shine.

John Pieper is a fifth grade teacher at Webster Stanley Elementary School in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. John’s background includes regular and special education teaching experiences. He has been teaching for twenty-two years. You can contact him by email at jpieper@new.rr.com

Report from the Directors

(continued from page 1)

agree that she brings distinct qualities of leadership to NSFRF that will complement our existing governance structure and help us serve our national community well.

Debbi will take over the Co-Director position held by Steve Bonchek (Roc) for the last four years. As a result of the growth of Harmony Education Center (HEC) and NSFRF, Roc will work full-time as Executive Director of HEC, and thus have more time available to invest in guiding the upcoming multi-million dollar Capital Campaign for HEC (which includes NSFRF), which will ensure permanent national presence for our school reform work. We expect that Roc will play a vital role in NSFRF, continuing many of the networking responsibilities he had as an NSFRF Co-Director. In addition, he will serve as a member of the NSFRF Accountability Council.

I will not serve as NSFRF’s founding Co-Director, working closely with Daniel Baron and Debbi Laidley, as well as with the Chair of the Accountability Council, Frances Hensley. While our working relationship will continue to be collaborative and democratic, the Accountability Council has requested that I assume the title “Facilitating Co-Director”, in acknowledgement of the organization’s need for one co-director who is ultimately accountable. All three co-directors will serve part-time.

We look forward to Debbi’s tenure in her new position and to Roc’s service in his expanded role with HEC.

Some Highlights of NSFRF’s History

March 1995

NSRF was established at Brown University by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR), with Paula Evans, Faith Dunne and Gene Thompson-Grove as its founding Co-Directors. Paula was also the Director of Professional Development at AISR; Gene and Faith were Principal Associates.

January 1999

NSRF’s Founding Co-Directors Faith Dunne and Gene Thompson-Grove announced that NSFRF would be leaving AISR, and that the Harmony Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana would assume responsibility for being the National Center for NSFRF.

June 2000

The first NSFRF council met and formed the foundation for the organization, including:

- A draft mission statement
- Agreed-upon goals of CFGs
- Governance structure for the organization that included:
  - National Center
  - Center of Activity
  - Council
  - Clusters of Interest

June 2001

A mission statement was agreed upon: the mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

Gene Thompson-Grove, Faith Dunne, Daniel Baron and Steve Bonchek assumed the responsibility for being NSFRF’s Co-Directors.

August 2001

Faith Dunne passed away; her position as Co-Director was not filled.

December 2002

At the recommendation of the NSFRF Council, the Co-Directors invited a group of NSFRF facilitators to revisit the NSFRF governance structure. This retreat created the new governance structure that was approved at the January 2003 Council Meeting. It included three co-directors as responsible for decisions and the formation of an NSFRF National Accountability Council that would hold the directors accountable for decisions made.

- NSFRF Centers of Activity Council

May 2004

Acting on the charge to actively seek out leaders who would reflect the diversity of the NSFRF constituency, the Accountability Council recommended that Debbi Laidley be as Co-Director of NSFRF.

The Accountability Council endorsed Roc Bonchek’s move from Co-Director of NSFRF to Executive Director of Harmony Education Center.