

# Connections

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## Director's Report Frances Hensley, Interim Director

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**D**uring the past six months NSRF has gone through a period of significant change in leadership. Communication often suffered as the Co-Directors and members of the Accountability Council diligently worked to figure out how best to lead NSRF through this transition. We are committed to improving communication to insure that the acts of governing and leading our organization are well known and transparent. So, as Interim Director and Chair of the Accountability Council, I am writing this column to all of you today to share some of the background of these changes as well as plans for the future leadership of NSRF.

Last spring, in response to Gene Thompson-Grove's impending resignation as a Co-Director, the Accountability Council announced a search for new NSRF leaders to join Debbi Laidley and Daniel Baron as Co-Directors. We were honored that some of the most talented and well-respected NSRF leaders across the country applied. In the months that followed, the demands of schedules filled with NSRF institutes and day-to-day professional lives led to gaps in communication and confusion around decision making that ultimately interrupted the hiring process. We found ourselves entering the new fiscal and school year with confusion around NSRF leadership, and no decisions were finalized. The Governance and Finance Task Force (Lois Butler, Camilla Greene, Steven Strull, and Frances Hensley), which is charged with overseeing NSRF governance, gathered on the phone in August to examine the issues and develop a

recommendation for action. We talked with each of the candidates and the Co-Directors, and we carefully considered how to best honor the individuals, the process, and the organization. In the end, we were forced by a wide range of conflicting input and concerns to stop the process. We crafted a recommendation that, instead of moving forward, the current search be suspended and that I, as Chair of the Accountability Council, serve as Interim Director along with Debbi and

Daniel in their roles as Co-Directors. The full Accountability Council met by conference call the following evening and unanimously approved the recommendation. We believed our decision would bring stability to the organization, allow us to enter the new fiscal year with a full leadership team in place, and give us the opportunity to develop a stronger and more transparent hiring process.

At the December meeting of the Accountability Council, the first face-to-face gathering in the new fiscal year, the Governance and Finance Task Force brought forward the recommendation to reconfigure the NSRF leadership structure. The Task Force recommended and the full Accountability Council unanimously approved a change from three Co-Directors to one full-time Director effective August first, 2006.

This is a significant change in our historical leadership structure. When NSRF first moved to Harmony Education Center, leadership was shared among the co-founders and leaders at Harmony. Faith Dunne, Gene Thompson-Grove, Daniel Baron, and Steve "Roc" Bonchek served

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as the first Co-Directors. As time passed, the membership and configuration changed, but the model of part-time Co-Directors remained.

NSRF Co-Directors have dedicated extraordinary amounts of time, expertise, and passion to assure that NSRF remained a vibrant organization. Under their leadership, we have grown to include 35 active Centers of Activity and more than 12,000 CFG Coaches. Our focus on equity has sharpened. We are widely recognized as a high quality professional development organization. Schools and districts throughout the country seek out our National Facilitators to lead school improvement efforts.

To lead us into the next decade of work, the Accountability Council members believe that the organization now needs a single full-time, paid leader; someone who is not encumbered by the demands of another full- or even part-time job at the same time. A person devoting full attention to NSRF will enable us to thrive in the coming years. Leadership by a single Director will allow the organization to respond to the current ebb and flow of changing priorities among traditional NSRF funding sources and help us to develop new sources of financial support. It will improve communication and coordination of efforts.

At the May 2006 Accountability Council meeting, the Council will create a process to select a new NSRF Director. The process will be announced on the NSRF listservs immediately following that meeting.

We are acutely aware that inherent in this decision is the loss of multiple perspectives and representation in decision making. The Accountability Council, the Centers of Activity Council, and the membership at large will be called upon to assure that NSRF continues to reflect the richness and complexity of its membership. To that end, the Accountability Council will also develop an explicit selection process and a tenure policy for its members. This action will also be shared with the community through the listserv.

Meanwhile, Daniel and Debbi will continue

to serve as Co-Directors, and I will continue as Interim Director with the aid and guidance of the Accountability Council and support of the National Office staff. We are dedicated to doing the hard work necessary to insure that NSRF continues as a vital organization that fosters educational and social equity. We are working with the National Office staff and CES Northwest, the Seattle Center of Activity, to plan the 2007 Winter Meeting. Efforts are underway in the National Office to offer new support to Centers of Activity. Grant writing and other fund raising efforts are receiving dedicated attention from the Co-Directors and the Accountability Council. New collaborations and partnerships are under development with the Co-Directors working with Centers of Activity around the country. As we continue these efforts and embark on others, we look forward to the next ten years working with all of you to create a national organization that fulfills its promise. ■

*Frances Hensley may be contacted at  
fhensley@uga.edu*

**Accountability Council Members:**

Daniel Baron  
Pete Bermudez  
Steve Bonchek  
Lois Butler  
Alan Dichter  
Camilla Greene  
Ted Hall  
Frances Hensley  
Debbi Laidley  
Josephine Rice  
Amy Schuff  
Steven Strull  
Gene Thompson-Grove

**"Aggressive Neglect"...**  
(continued from page 6)

I pay attention "with" others, recognizing that it's fundamentally disrespectful and ineffectual to pay attention "for" them. ■

*To read more about the thoughts of Dr. Ladson Billings, Jonathan Kozol and others about Equity after Katrina, read the Annenberg Institute for School Reform's Winter 2006 issue of Voices in Urban Education.*

*To share the ways you are taking up the challenge to move beyond "polishing the apple of apartheid," contact me, dbambino@earthlink.net, and we'll share your thoughts and experiences in Connections.*