

# Center of Activity Report: Pennsylvania

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The Pennsylvania Center of Activity is actually the greater Philadelphia Center, with members who work in schools in Philadelphia, the adjacent suburbs, and New Jersey. The Leadership CFG that directs our work has eleven members who have been meeting in our current community for nearly five years. Most of us are National Facilitators and some of us have been working together in schools for almost twenty years, as well as in assorted CFGs since 1996.

We are a community of educators across difference. We are white and African American, Anglo and Latino, female and male, Christian and Jewish educators. Today our core of eleven members is dispersed across the spectrum of school administration, from elementary through intermediate and high school, and at the district level as leaders responsible for the professional development of all administrators, and for support for student assistance teams. As a graduate student and external coach, I am the only member who is not working full-time in the schools.

Most of our CFG work is embedded in the way we do business as administrators and internal/external coaches. However, we have also offered seminars for new coaches and summer professional development for administrators in our districts each year.

This year our Leadership CFG is digging into the text *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. While we have discussed equity issues in the past, this intentional focus on race is “disturbing our comfort” and opening us up to new possibilities for growth and changes in practice. Here are some reflections from last month’s meeting:

- This group is taking me to a level of thinking and self-evaluation that I did not envision before.
- Examining who I am and how the world sees me vs. the world I experience...
- Equity/Race Roadmap-Powerful time spent in self-reflection, deepening self-awareness, envisioning the physical (& emotional & social) journey with the goal in sight. I know that I will revisit this roadmap either alone or with this group to maintain my focus on the journey.
- The continuation of your acceptance--there was a moment of fear as I passed my very personal roadmap the first time--until I realized it was in the hands of a very trusted critical friend.

- Be courageous in my conversation with staff.
- AWESOME activity; very reflective; some of my experiences were buried deep but this brought them to the surface; appreciated the sharing of others that allows me the opportunity to see what shaped/shapes perspectives on race, equity...I can use this with my staff.

As we come to the close of another school year we are pressing forward with our focus on race and equity by filtering next year’s planning through the lens presented by Singleton and Linton’s opening questions:

- What is it that [we] educators should know and be able to do to narrow the racial achievement gap?
- How will [we] educators know when [we] are experiencing success in [our] efforts to narrow the racial achievement gap?
- What [will we] do as [we] discover what [we] don’t yet know and are not yet able to do to eliminate the racial achievement gap?

As part of our efforts, we are moving the text-based conversation into our schools and leadership teams and reconsidering the shape and design of our seminar and workshop agendas.

Organizationally, we are taking a long view of our work and our ability to sustain it over time: we need to mount an all-sided campaign to partner with a university or universities in the coming years. As budgets become tighter, our schools need outside support to fund the learning and practice of collaborative learning communities in the Philadelphia area. To date we have, and have had, case-by-case university support of specific seminars and retreats developed through grants, our personal networks and our job-related roles. We need a sustained plan of action to develop a university-based and -funded Center of Continuing Education for Critical Friends with the possibility of college credits and researcher supports. University support would also allow us to reach out to students and family members in our efforts to extend community membership to the nonprofessional stakeholders who are at the center of our work. We welcome the feedback of our colleagues in NSRF who have already developed successful university partnerships. ■

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