

# Winter Meeting Wrap-Up

Sarah Childers, Indiana

In December, nearly 300 teachers, educational leaders, school administrators and researchers gathered in Tampa, Florida, for the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting. Participants hailed from all over, coming from as far away as Washington State, Maine and even China to take part in NSRF's largest annual event. Thanks to our partnership with the Lastinger Center for Learning, University of Florida and our Florida

Center of Activity, we also welcomed more than a third of our total participants from Florida, a state where

NSRF work is becoming a staple of the professional development work of many schools and districts.

Preceding the Winter Meeting, NSRF also hosted two other sessions: the 3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum, and for the first time, Core Principles of Critical Friendship, which served as an introductory session for those new to the work of NSRF. Both of these sessions were resounding successes, and you can look for them to again precede the next Winter Meeting.

We kicked off the Winter Meeting with a welcome from our Director, Steven Strull, and an energizing presentation that personified some of NSRF's core beliefs about teaching and learning. Ms. Gloria Merriex and her class of fifth graders came



Duval Elementary students "solve it!"

all the way from Duval Elementary School, a five-hour drive, to be with us Thursday morning at 9 am and share their incredible practice

of revolutionary math instruction. Through song, rhythm, and call-and-response, Ms. Merriex teaches



A home group

her students complex mathematical theories and skills, with which most of our NSRF audience was not able to keep pace. They left us all excited and motivated to continue our work toward improved student achievement in our home groups.

Participants spent the rest of day one, all of day two and most of day three in their home groups, working with experienced facilitators on the issues of most importance to them, building their skills and reflecting on their practice. Some representative comments from participants about their home group experiences are:

- This is the best home group I've had in three Winter Meetings.
- My group quickly functioned well, thanks to the facilitators and the openness of the members.
- We really became a "home group" and are going to try to maintain our group online – that says a lot!

Friday night we took some time to relax and enjoy our time together with Fiesta Cubana, our Cuban-themed party. We enjoyed the music of Sol Caribe and the beautiful Tampa weather, until it rained and we moved the party inside. The rain didn't dampen the spirit of the party, and what was probably the most popular NSRF party to date kept going well past the appointed end time!

Saturday morning, we were glad to be able to have Dr. Rudy Crew, Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, as our keynote speaker. He

closed out our meeting with an inspirational speech (transcript and video online) that set the charge for participants on their way home to continue their work and learning, for the sake of students.

Due to a big winter storm moving in, most participants who had planned to stay for the scheduled Centers Council Meeting Saturday afternoon had to leave, so the meeting was cancelled.



Dr. Rudy Crew

(continued on page 17)

Reflection quotes:

Warm

- Our facilitators did an excellent job of meeting all needs of our group.
- Incredible! This was an unbelievably relevant and productive conference.
- Thank you for bringing in Gloria Merriex. She was quite an inspiration. What an amazing “giver” she is.
- We worked together more deeply than any other group I have ever been a part of!
- I plan to do this work at my school. I think this is a great way to look at and learn from student work.

Cool

- I would like more “nuts and bolts” information/resources about how to implement SLCs within different school settings.
- I was disappointed in the facilitation of my Home Group. It felt like the main facilitator was teaching us. The focus seemed to be on acting as a CFG rather than on deepening any aspect of our facilitation. Not much processing – and even sometimes, no debrief.
- As far as I could tell issues of equity were not part of the ongoing conversation.
- Time was rushed but meaningful.
- I brought student work and was disappointed I did not get to present.

Instead, those of us who remained met to debrief the meeting and discuss plans for the next Winter Meeting.

The 2009 Winter Meeting, which will be our lucky 13, will be held in Texas, where we will be hosted by no fewer than three NSRF Centers of Activity- Houston A+ Challenge, The Urban Forum for Leadership and Learning/Houston Independent School District, and San Antonio NSRF Center at Trinity University. We look forward to seeing you all again next January! ■

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*For more Winter Meeting follow-up, including evaluation results and please visit our website,  
www.nsrffharmony.org.*

year fatigue to be with their groups. Similarly, this fall the school superintendent proposed a program based on CFG protocols for teacher leaders. This developed into our TFT (Teacher Facilitator Training) program. The TFT was designed to provide two to three day training for all teacher leaders to become facilitators of CFG protocols for all school meetings and collaboration on every team across the school. The intent of this program was to initiate a kind of systemic CFG presence across the school to provide equity, voice, and effectiveness in meetings at every level.

I cannot help but be disappointed that the essential work of teachers sharing their teaching practices and strategies in the context of comfortable community circles is not moving forward as quickly as I would like. I am encouraged, however, by the positive reactions of many of my colleagues as they are exposed to the protocols in areas like full faculty meetings, key accreditation committees involving parents, admin, and teachers, as well as developing programs like teacher assistant training, parent education groups, and high school student associations. That's not to say that we have found no resistance to the use of protocols, but what began as an October cohort of 15 participants is moving into a scope of acceptance and use across an organization of hundreds. Indeed, as we get ready to go back to school after the Chinese New Year break, I feel that, by and large, the majority of teachers in this faculty of about 300 are feeling the community building power of the conversations that CFG protocols bring to their professional lives. ■

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**13<sup>th</sup> Annual  
NSRF Winter Meeting  
Houston, Texas  
January 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

for more information, visit:  
[www.nsrffharmony.org/  
wintermeeting.html](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/wintermeeting.html)