

Center of Activity Report: New Center Established in New York

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The state of New York established 37 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to support local school districts and meet their educational and financial goals. The BOCES model provides accountability, municipal sharing, efficiency and equity. This type organization assists local districts with many facets of professional development, as well as a myriad of other services, recently expanded to include CFG support at the Capital Region BOCES.

In the fall of 2006, William Pollock from Rutgers University Center for Effective School Practices (CESP) presented a new coaches institute to 13 people from the Capital Region BOCES and Schenectady City School District. That seminar was the spark that began a continued inquiry into the resources and professional development offered by the National School Reform Faculty. The original group of participants included special education professional developers, principals of special education programs, a director of special education and principals of regular education elementary schools. A relationship was ignited and a bond formed between those who participated; that bond has grown and touched countless individuals statewide as well as in the Capital Region BOCES. The new coaches immediately created a coaches support group (their own CFG) to help each other as they practiced their newfound craft and to continue learning. The coaches support group has met quarterly since that time and each individual has continued to learn and grow with new skills. What they have learned has been embedded in many school districts' professional development opportunities, in the local BOCES classrooms, and in the leadership activities of the BOCES. The BOCES special education leadership continued its relationship with Bill Pollock over two summer retreats in 2007 and 2008. The leadership utilized the tools of the CFGs to assist them in analyzing their data and developing plans for school improvement and future initiatives.

Out of the new work in the Capital Region, two experienced coaches, Deven Horne and Renee Beaulieu, were inspired to set their sights on becoming National Facilitators and creating an upstate Center of Activity. A need had been recognized to offer another new coaches institute with the emphasis on building and supporting professional learning communities. Deven and Renee asked Bill Pollock to mentor them in a new coaches seminar, which was offered in the late fall of 2008.



Sixteen participants registered and the BOCES supported the offering so that its component districts could receive continuing aid from the BOCES to participate. Deven and Renee's personal growth in providing this seminar and the local coaches' support and encouragement led the pair to become National Facilitators as part of the process. The new coaches five-day institute was completed in early March. The 16 participants came from three school districts, the BOCES and the National School Leaders Network. The three-day introductory part of the new coaches institute in the fall was used to get folks started on the process in their schools. Three months later, the group reconvened to complete the process of growth and complete the five-day seminar.

One of the protocols used in one session was reflection upon the meaning of a word. The word used was "courage," a prelude to a text rendering of a section of the book *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer. The individuals' perspectives on that word were enlightening and encouraging. Palmer emphasizes "the growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it." As a group of educators using the protocols, we have to call upon our own courage to move forward with our convictions and the value we hold for the CFG process. We are continually buoyed by the courage of the educators in the CFGs to share, to live up to the norms established by the group, to encourage each other and to examine deeply our missions as educators.

The Capital Region BOCES is now an established center of activity with two new National Facilitators leading a new direction in developing professional learning communities in the New York upstate geographic region. Plans are being

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into a professional learning community. Allen ends this study with the statement that, "Extraordinary coaches come in all kinds of 'personality packages' but will be unified by their tenacious commitment to the individual growth of the individual teachers and administrators with whom they work, as well as the development of the professional community and school community that those people create and re-create every day."

The Appendix of this text outlines the structure of the ISA, a model that many schools will seek to emulate in their own change processes.

I will recommend this text to my school and district administrators. The study of the complexities of the coaching model will both alleviate tensions and offer a new lens through which to view the many strands of human interactions that contribute to building a positive school climate. ■

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Correction

In the Winter 2009 issue of *Connections*, we mistakenly credited the article "Center of Activity Report: San Antonio" to Ileana Liberatore. The author, in fact, was Patricia Norman. We apologize for the error.

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made to offer a new coaches institute this summer and possibly another retreat for the leaders in the area. The local support groups for the CFG's in the region's schools continue, and we hope they will expand to more schools as other institutions observe our successes. ■

Reference:

- Palmer, Parker, (1998) *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teachers' Life*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

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