During my middle-school years, I was reluctant to participate in class and couldn’t care less. As I was entering high school, my eldest brother was graduating high school at the top of his class and was accepted into a prestigious Ivy League school—the first person to do so in the family. There I sat at my brother’s graduation, with his name being called so often for so many honors that the crowd became tired of clapping. That was the moment that my eyes were opened to not only going to school and attending classes, but also excelling to and being involved in my school community. Even though you might not be an older sibling, you can still make a difference in someone’s life and that is my goal as a CFG facilitator.” – Denise

“I am in my senior year of high school, head drum major of my high school marching band and the only black male left standing in Eisenhower’s first class of International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme students, but who would have guessed at one time I was falling through the cracks? There was a point right after my mom died when everything started to go wrong. My dad, his job, the bills, the mortgage, stress and above all, my education were all tumbling down around me. My grades began to fall and it was evident to a certain teacher, Ms. Candy Core. She saw my grades, my test scores and my attitude take a dramatic drop. “De’Vonta there is something wrong!” she asked over and over again. Being prideful, I would tell her “nothing,” and she would leave it there.

One day while working on my homework after school in her room, I became frustrated and broke down; I was a mess. Ms. Core came over to me and hugged me. “Everything’s okay, De’Vonta,” she told me. From there I told her my story, she listened, she understood, and she helped. She helped in improving my test scores to As, and by reminding me how to study. She edited and checked all my homework assignments and ultimately helped reinforce me. If it was not for Ms. Core, I would still be a mess and only the Lord knows where I would be. My name is De’Vonta, I am in the top 5 percent of my class, head drum major, and the only black male left standing in my school’s first class of IBDP students, but who would have guessed that from Ms. Candy Core from falling through the cracks.” – De’Vonta

These students shared their stories of adults who had made differences in their lives. We are sure each and every teacher, administra-

investigation into his grades, high 90s, all we could figure out was that he was a quiet, good kid in a sea of rowdy regular students, and his teacher did not want to lose him. So we asked Vladimir if he wanted Mari to change his schedule. He said he didn’t know probably not, and he was wavering on what to do. So, I nudged him to make a decision. He moved to honors, and three weeks later he moved up to AP. Although progress was made academically, Vlad still only spoke minimally.

Months later, an opportunity to be a part of a student CFG raised its head, and I encour-aged Vladimir to attend. He did, but just five months ago, I remember instructing (and if you know me, you know I like to instruct, pushing and usually a little “barking” in there) him that his mission during the last three days of the CFG seminar was to initiate a conversa-tion with an adult. He told me he did on the last day.

Fast forward to present day, Vladimir is active in school, taking three Advanced Placement courses. He has joined the speech and debate team and has spoken in front of an international conference – who knew! – Michaela

My Story
Vladimir, Eisenhower High School
Houston, Texas

I remember sitting in class daydreaming all the time about what I could be, but never actu-ally taking the steps to achieve my dreams. For me it was not until I was given an ultimatum that I actually began my ascent into education. I was sitting in my art class, a sophomore, with no real goals in life. My teacher, Ms. Kelley, came over to my table to talk about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be 10 or 20 years from now. But that day was different. She called over a fellow teacher, Ms. Glamer, and they told me about challenging myself, and how I could do so much better if I could take more advanced courses. I was (continued on page 11)

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connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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he 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. The BOCES model 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 (ESP) 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 professors, 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 con-tinue 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 opportuni-ties, in the local BOCES, the Capital Region BOCES, 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 profes-sional 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 sup-ported the offering so that its components and outcomes could receive continuing aid from the BOCES to participate. Deven and Renee’s personal growth in providing this seminar and the local coaches’ sup-port and encouragement led the pair to be part of the 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 cour-age to move forward with our convictions and the value we hold for the CFG process. We are con-tinually buoyed by the courage of the educators in the CFGs to share, to live up to the norms estab-lished by the group, to encourage each other and to examine deeply our missions as educators.

The Capital Region BOCES is now an estab-lished 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 (continued on page 16)
Coaching Whole School Change... (continued from page 3)

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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Center of Activity Report... (continued from page 7)

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:

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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.