

“NESA, a community of schools, strives to create a sense of belonging and identity, diminish feelings of professional isolation and foster a culture of mutual support and professional engagement.”

“Collaboration is the cornerstone of our success.”

***NESA: Core Values--
www.nesacenter.org***

Critical Friends Travel the World

By David Nelson, Teacher and Faculty Development and Growth Program Coordinator, American Community Schools of Athens, Greece, NESA School Representative, NSRF National Facilitator, nelsond@acs.gr

The Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESAs) welcomed the National School Reform Faculty to Bangkok, Thailand where the annual Spring Educators Conference for International Schools of the NESAs region was held April 4-8, 2013. Conducting its latest international CFG New Coaches training as a part of this year’s conference, NSRF extended its services to the 37 participants from American and International schools of the Near East, and South Asia region.

The NESAs Spring Conference boasts some of the most widely acclaimed professional development experts from the United States and around the world and annually attracts over 600 participants from international schools. Collaboration is intrinsic to NESAs’s vision of professional development as an organization that strives to “create dynamic, collaborative professional relationships that transcend current barriers and boundaries in order to maximize student learning in member schools.” This year, the CFG New Coaches Training added the Critical Friends element by offering a special 5-Day Strand, in which teachers and administrators earned CFG Coaches Certification.

The training attracted an equal blend of administrators and teachers from the region, with larger school groups from schools in Saudi Arabia. Teachers from International schools in Malaysia,

India, Kuwait, Jordan, Greece, Bahrain, Dubai, and many more, discovered the value of Critical Friends Groups and the applications of a variety of protocols. Many felt that the model will help them to address unique challenges of international schools by maximizing the involvement and interactions of faculty. Given a relatively high turnover of staff and the unique make-up of the student body of their schools, many felt that CFG groups can provide an invaluable resource by extending collaboration.



One participant commented on the final day of reflections expressing that the training was “just what I needed at this point in my career.” Another teacher described the training as “Transformative!” and ended feeling confident that her team and she “now possess the understanding and skills to begin to lead our school forward in improving learning on every level with all stakeholders involved.”

This year’s offering of extended trainings within the context of an already packed conference was a bit of a

trial run to see whether participants would favor focus over numerous opportunities. What we found was that the participants in the CFG training felt empowered by the extension of time in the five-day training, and felt that they had gained a great deal from their peers and new Critical Friends.



Specifically, one participant reflected that the experience was “Wonderful—awesome! I feel like I got more out of this than many of my colleagues in the regular NESAs sessions, because of the extension of learning and practice. I really felt like this training is empowering for both teachers and teacher leaders.”



As the ACS Athens School Representative to NESAs and now a NSRF International Facilitator, I wish to commend David Chojnacki, Executive Director of NESAs and his team for this year’s impeccably designed Spring Educators Conference. It was a tremendous privilege to train under Michele Mattoon, Director of NSRF and side by side with Tonio Verzone and Kevin Horton. As our world of Critical Friends expands around the globe, more and more professionals understand the value of the work of NSRF in helping connect all of us with innovative ways to improve teaching and learning. 

