

to trust their peers to represent them and make decisions.

- » Schools are pools of unfairness. Schools are set up for poor people to go to poor schools and rich people to go to rich schools, so the poor are not as well educated, so it's harder for them to get into politics. We can't have rich people fixing problems for the poor.
- » The educational system is messed up. There are things I didn't know that I didn't know!
- » Schools need to teach civics, both how a democracy works and how to participate.
- » Everybody should know what's on the United States citizenship exam!
- » If you don't know what rights you have, you're not educated enough.
- » Maybe there is a conspiracy... I saw a YouTube video about how out of control things would be if teenagers knew their rights!

### What works about Harmony School's democracy?

- » One thing that works at Harmony is that students have a voice in hiring teachers.
- » For example, this afternoon we discussed how to spend extra money from the budget.
- » In one of my classes, we list the topics people suggest to discuss and vote on the list.
- » Harmony is good at showing people how to care.
- » A few years ago there was a sense that the voting system was unfair and we changed the percentages needed for majority.
- » This reminds me of the national election where it matters who shows up.
- » Harmony is good at including a wide range of age groups to get involved and voice their opinions.
- » Our Student Solidarity committee is the only democratic group that I think works and is fair.

### What doesn't?

- » What doesn't work is that people vote for their friends, and not for somebody that would be good at the job. Voting becomes about popularity and that's frustrating to have an unqualified candidate.
- » Some of our rules are confusing and dumb, which is similar to a larger working democracy.
- » Our voting system is misrepresentative and statistically flawed when the votes are split among many issues.
- » The popularity issue is magnified by being a small school.
- » What doesn't work is how problems are handled. There are not enough consequences to stop the same problems from happening over and over.
- » Our school doesn't teach how to follow through on issues.
- » Some of the same problems happen over and over again (like people talking in class or stealing food from the kitchen) and reminders during our meetings are not enough.

### How can our school be more democratic?

- » We could change the voting system by ranking candidates or issues.
- » We could have different voting processes for different issues or items.
- » We need to figure out how to navigate the messiness of democracy. The rules were made by people and can be re-written!

### Participants' debrief

- » This conversation felt really democratic!
- » I liked how there was time for everyone to share and nobody interrupted to argue.
- » I was glad to talk about how problems have been handled.
- » I liked having the notebook and the time to respond and write, rather than making random comments.

### Coach's debrief

Just like many of my Critical Friends Group meetings with my colleagues, this protocol raised more questions for me that it answered! But it also inspired some great ideas and a very rich discussion among the students. I will admit that in coaching my students, it is even harder for me to maintain my facilitator role and not interrupt to participate. It was very tempting to play "teacher" by asking students to elaborate on their answers, but that would have changed the conversation entirely and focused it on what I was interested in discussing, rather than what they had to discuss. While a few kids passed on one or two rounds, they all were very engaged and used their little notebooks to record their thoughts. In fact, they were so engaged that they all ignored the cookies and popcorn till our meeting was over!

Since our meeting, I have had the opportunity to follow up with the participants and hear some elaboration of their thinking, and to encourage them to take steps towards their suggestions for improvement. I am also excited to discuss my notes with my own CFG group of Harmony colleagues and to hear their interpretations and ideas for improving the democratic process in our school, and for fulfilling our mission to prepare our students for participation in our governmental democratic process.

### Closing

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voters. The issues faced by teenagers in a school democracy resonate so strongly with those we face as a democratic nation. As evidenced by the students' comments, those parallels and connections are certainly not lost on them.

As I work on ways to increase my own participation in our national democracy, I am reminded of the importance and value of the work we already do in our classrooms and schools. I find myself even more motivated to use proto-

cols to foster democratic processes and equitable discussions in our little school. The structures and agreements that make CFG communities and protocols work also help us practice democracy. I share my experience and reflections in the hopes that all of us can continue to build our democracy using the tools of NSRF and CFG work, and that you might also share your experiences, too. 🍀

## Good luck, Dave!

It is with a sad heart that we at the NSRF must say our goodbyes and express our best wishes to Dr. Dave Lehman upon his "retirement" from our organization. This will be Dave's last issue as the contributing editor of *Connections*.

You may not know that Dave has a long history with the NSRF. His school, The Alternative Community School (now called the Lehman Alternative Community School) in Ithaca, NY, was one of the first schools to receive the five-day CFG training. Dave was the founding principal of that school and he gladly supported his teachers in doing the work they all found so valuable. In 2001 he took the five-day CFG Coaches' training himself and became a certified CFG coach. Not long after his retirement from the school, Dave became a National Facilitator for us. From there, he was asked to become the interim director for NSRF during our transition time in 2008, until he handed over the director's baton to Michele Mattoon a year or so later.

Steve "Roc" Bonchek, executive director and co-founder of Harmony says, "Because of my 30-year relationship with Dave I knew he was the perfect person to take over the director role for NSRF when the position opened up in 2008. Based on observing Dave for all those years I knew his thoughtfulness, calm yet strong demeanor, and leadership qualities with colleagues



**Dave Lehman on the job as an NSRF National Facilitator**

and students were a perfect match for guiding NSRF into its next stage of development. NSRF would not be the strong organization it is today if it was not for Dave. I am forever grateful for Dave's indispensable contributions to NSRF. On a personal level, Dave has provided me with advice and friendship in all sorts of situations. I look forward to continuing to spend time with Dave and his wife Judy for many years to come on new adventures."

Michele originally met Dave during an NSRF conference. She says, "Dave immediately impressed me as a thoughtful, warm, and caring human being—one that I wanted to connect and collaborate with, as well as learn from. Dave's deep love of learning is apparent to anyone who gets to know him. He strongly

believes that every human being on the earth deserves a quality education and, as such, is an untiring advocate for equity, creating activities and protocols to promote equity among professionals and in the classroom."

Recently, Dave decided to spend the next phase of his life devoting himself to writing a book and engaging more deeply in political action. We will miss his wise presence at NSRF but understand that the world will be a better place as he connects with many others through these new avenues for his good work. We wish you all the best, Dave, and from the bottom of our hearts, thank you for all your support.

Be well and carry on, Dave!  
With warm regards from the NSRF  
and Harmony Education Center