



## Critical Friends Groups Purpose and Work

*Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.*

The purpose of a CFG is to provide professional development that translates into improved student learning. This adult learning is accomplished through formal, ongoing interactions of small groups of staff that participate voluntarily. A trained CFG coach, who is often a member of the faculty, leads the CFG. These groups, if engaging and effective, increase student learning, contribute to the participants' professional growth, and strengthen the school and district's capacity to function as learning communities.

To improve their practice, enhance student learning, and close the achievement gap, members of the CFG focus on questions that are both global and specific to their practice. For example:

- What important tasks can't my students accomplish?
- Why can't my students accomplish these tasks?
- What does the student work tell us? What evidence do I have of students' understanding or lack of understanding?
- What have I done in the past to address this issue?
- How can we help my students accomplish the task?
- What multiple measures can we use to demonstrate students' mastery/growth of understanding?

Under the guidance of their CFG coach, who also participates as a CFG member, Critical Friends Group members work together to:

- Develop shared norms and values
- Focus on student learning
- Make their practice public
- Engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative work
- Inquire into, analyze and reflect upon student work

CFG members use their own insights and experiences, content or frameworks from other sources, and the following strategies and tools to acquire the knowledge, skills and perspectives they need to address the questions they have about their practice.

- Dealing with issues and dilemmas related to student learning
- Looking closely at and learning from student work/student learning data
- Peer observations and debriefing
- Learning from print and other texts
- Looking at and reflecting upon teacher/educator work