of the three NSRF co-directors, I am the only one who wasn’t involved in NSRF’s national network before 1999. Up until then my exposure to NSRF was as the director of Harmony School. With 185 pre-k to 12th grade students and sixteen faculty, we had utilized and benefited from our CFG at Harmony since we started our first group in 1995. Consequently, when NSRF decided to leave Brown University and become part of Harmony I had only an inkling of NSRF’s potential to touch tens of thousands of educators and millions of students. All that has changed. Since Harmony’s founding in 1974 with four high school students, I had always hoped that we could serve as a catalyst for public school reform. The basic philosophy of Harmony had its origins in the “free school movement” of the late 1960s and early 1970s. That philosophy can best be summed up in the following statement: Schools should be a place where all people are engaged in an authentic democratic community and together have meaningful and revealing dialogue that begins to formulate new dimensions of ourselves and of society. Ron Miller, president of the Foundation for Educational Renewal which funded the first three issues of Connections, writes eloquently about this movement in his book Free Schools, Free People, available through SUNY Press (www.sunypress.edu). When I started to experience the process of CFGs in 1995 it seemed very consistent with Harmony’s philosophy. CFGs appeared to be the perfect group process within which people in schools could have this “meaningful and revealing dialogue.” In the three years that
At Harmony we have three CFGs made up of teachers and staff, one Coach CFG made up of faculty, students, parents, and community members. The effects of CFG work on the Harmony culture have been profound. The first thing that I noticed as director was the expanded level of teacher leadership that I observed in faculty meetings. This from a faculty that was already empowered to make all curricular and budgetary decisions. However, even within this engaged faculty of 16, there was a gap between faculty and students and teachers working together in decision making meetings that involve CFG strategies are utilized routinely.

In Cleveland, the CFG work began several months ago with the notion of CFGs. I introduced the notion of CFGs. The Cleveland work began in September as director of Professional Development about training two coaches in each of Cleveland’s eighty-nine elementary schools.

The results of that meeting and ensuing conversations have led to a brand new small school in Cleveland—Success Tech Academy—and the widespread work of CFGs throughout many of Cleveland’s elementary and middle schools. The possibility of creating a small school was facilitated by monthly visits from Philadelphia NSRF Facilitator Debbie Bambino. Debbie’s work there over the course of nearly 14 months resulted in the opening of the school last September. The training of over 200 coaches has been facilitated by a team of 20 NSRF National Facilitators who have been making monthly visits to Cleveland since November, 2001.

Members of this national team come from Ohio, Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Georgia, Oregon, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. Amazingly, even with the brutal Cleveland winter, they met on every single day that they had committed to be there. The NSRF team has made monthly visits to Cleveland over the last sixteen months, and through it I have only been there three of those days, each time I have had the opportunity to participate in sessions and talk to many Cleveland coaches and district leaders.

When I first heard about the KnowledgeWorks Foundation’s High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), I was intrigued, hopeful, and eager to be a part of this initiative that is unlike any other high school transformation initiative. The key elements of the OHSTI that appeal to me are:

- the 15 Non-Negotiables
- the ongoing modeling of supportive and equitable relationship-building through the community engagement practices
- the collaborative relationship building and support built into the culture of small schools and the school coaches.

Overall the common thread of this work of transforming large, high schools into small schools is the importance of trusting, supporting, and empowering the stakeholders in order to be able to carry out their educational mission.

KnowledgeWorks High School Transformation Initiative

Camilla Greene, New Jersey

The Harwood Institute has partnered with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation to help districts transform their high schools. Each of these 17 school districts are publically held accountable for supporting the high school transformation initiative and are held accountable to chart how they were going to go from their current reality to 21st Century Schools.

In 2003 the OHSTI launched an initiative to begin the transformation to small high schools. This challenge includes a pre-planning year, a deep planning year and two implementation years. This first year each school had to incorporate the language and intent of the 15 Non-Negotiables in their school portfolio. One of the Non-Negotiables is that the school community and all of the stakeholders must continue in the creation, implementation, and ongoing evaluation phases of each small school.

The Harwood Institute has provided coaches for each of the 41 high schools in the transformation initiative. Each school was coached collaboratively with the district and the school to help create a school portfolio. These school portfolios were modeled with detailed descriptions of their current reality along with their narrative vision and strategic plan for transformation.

KnowledgeWorks provided a school coach for each of the 41 high schools in the transformation initiative. By working collaboratively with the district and the school to help create a school portfolio. These school portfolios were modeled with detailed descriptions of their current reality along with their narrative vision and strategic plan for transformation.

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