J
uneau, Alaska, located along Southeast Alaska’s Inside Passage, is surrounded by glaciers, majes-
tic mountains, and rainforest. A sense of isola-
tion results from the lack of roads into Juneau, as the
only way in is by plane or boat. Even with this
isolation, it remains the capital of Alaska and repre-
sents a diverse population. The residents of Juneau
take great pride in how they support their schools
and the many sports and activities available to stu-
dents. Since many of their sports programs are not
school-funded, community groups raise millions of
dollars to finance the travel of sports teams in and
out of Juneau to insure high quality competition and
participation. A great emphasis is placed on stu-
dent involvement in the arts and other activities
as well. A richness of cultural diversity, represented
by Alaska Natives as well as people from areas
together, exists in the community. After spending a
significant amount of time there, one comes to realize that Juneau is a very special
place, with its awe-inspiring natural beauty, strong sense of community, and cultural diversity.
Even in this special place, however, the cloud of racism and poverty thrives and impacts a signif-

cant number of people in the community. The Juneau-
Douglas High School program has traditionally not
served all students well, especially Alaska Natives
and students of poverty. After a comprehensive look
at the data, the grim facts show that the overall
graduation rate is only 65%, and significantly lower
for Alaska Natives and students of poverty. Alaska
Natives and students of poverty also achieve at
lower levels, drop out more, participate less in activ-
ities, and are grossly underrepresented in upper-level
classes offered by the high school.

In 1998, the School District and community
members began advocating for another high school
that would help to reduce the size of the current
high school, in order to better meet the needs of
more students. Not everyone in Juneau agreed
with this approach, and it took eight years and
seven different votes before the community finally
approved another high school. Even after the vote
of approval, there remained an air of anger and
divisiveness over the building of the new school.
The traditions of a one-high-school community
remained a strong voice, and any change to move
two high schools was very hard for many people
to accept. They feared that their strong sports pro-
gram, as well as the entire tradition of a large com-
prehensive high school, would be compromised
with the building of an additional school.

When the bond election finally passed in
2005, the Juneau School District made a bold
move: instead of simply planning for the new
school, they decided to open an all-com-

passing high school educational plan to address
the protacted lack of student success and issues
around equity. They realized that to make any
significant change, they needed to go public with
their data and actually create a process where
all members of this diverse community would be
heard. At this point, we were hired as facilitators,
representing the Colorado Critical Friends Group,
because we proposed a process that would utilize
structures and protocols to create surfaced the
type of conversations that had been previously used in
community meetings. Working with school district
leaders, we created a formal process called the
Next Generation: Our Kids, Our Community that
would include:

• forming an Advisory Committee,
• facilitating community forums,
• developing a website,
• creating and publishing proposals,
• submitting a final recommendation for a high
school educational plan.

School district leaders realized that they faced
several challenges. The community divided, not
only on the need for a new high school, but also
on the type of changes needed to address their
lack of student success. Even some high school
staff members were resistant to any type of change.
Our challenge was
to incorporate comm-

(continued on page 18)

Leading the Work by Doing the Work
(continued from page 16)

for our work, use essential questions to drive fac-
ulty meetings and collaboratively examine data.”
Another principal described a more ambitious use
of the CFG ideas, “I decided that my approach
was to run my faculty meeting as a CFG.”

Two principals depicted two very powerful
examples of connections between the TILE CFG
and the leadership practice of the district admin-
istrative team. In the first example, one principal
explained how a presentation that she made about
her CFG work influenced how the district adminis-
trative team functioned. She explained the connec-
tion in this way:

“I made a presentation about CFGs to the dis-

trict leadership team. I presented on CFGs and
PLGs (Professional Learning Communities). We
did first a Chalk Talk, I talked about National
School Reform Faculty and the components of a
CFG. We did a Consultancy about a professional
dilemma presented by one of the principals. We
did a check in to make sure it was closing piece.
Ultimately, what happened was the Assistant
Superintendent decided that the district leader-
ship team meetings would be run as a CFG.
Throughout the year, principals brought student
work, a dilemma or a text based discussion to the
meeting. They still do it today. This year, the
principals are running their grade level meetings
as CFGs.

A second connection to district leadership
practices was made using the group surfaced the
three TILE CFG members as elementary princi-

al principals. These three principals explained that hav-
ing one district administrative team - eased their transi-
tion into the district and changed the conversation
and practice of their entire team. One principal
described the effect,

Before my TILE CFG colleagues arrived, the
previous superintendent tried to get conversations
about teaching and learning going on the leader-
ship team. He tried to do a book study on Good
To Great (Collins, 2001). They rode him out of
town. But now, it makes a difference with three of us
who understand the value of this work.

In general, the TILE CFG members saw a
number of very strong connections between the
work of the TILE CFG and their leadership prac-
tice.

Summary
In summary, these two studies describe, in
two different contexts, one way school leaders
can learn to value and support CFG work in their
schools. Simply put, supportive school leaders
do the work for themselves. The district team
was a district team made significant gains towards
becoming a more reflective, collaborative learn-
ing community, and to a lesser extent transferred
some of that learning to their leadership practice.
In the second study, a group which had a more
robust understanding of CFG work created and
sustained a leadership CFG, whose work then
influenced their work as school leaders.

The comparison of the two studies, however,
opts us other dilemmas. The district team which
was coerced by the superintendent to do collabora-
tive work, and although it took a great deal of
support and good facilitation, the power of the
work eventually began to get some traction and
show some results. Because the group was made up
of an entire district team, the potential benefit
to the district and the district’s children seems
much greater than in the second group whose
members were much more skilled, but from a
variety of districts. The next challenge is to figure
out a way to leverage professional community
building on a district and regional level. Our
second regional TILE CFG started in October. I
will keep you posted

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These studies are available on the NSRI
website, at www.snrsharmony.org

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The New Meaning of Educational Change

C ollaboration makes a positive difference only when it is focused on student performance for all and on the associated innovative practices that can make improvement happen for previously disengaged students." (p. 285)

In this fourth edition, Fullan reexamines educational change in light of the growing body of knowledge about the process of change. For change to actually occur, certain factors must be met. Citing numerous research studies, Fullan notes the importance of relationships, meaning and motivation in effective and sustained educational change. Change takes time, effort, and on-going support. To further understand the change, it turns out that an individual must experience some part of the proposed change before understanding what the change really is. By experiencing the change, by achieving success, an individual can come to believe in the change. Fullan argues that belief underlies all actions. For successful initiatives involving change, a critical factor is allowing an appropriate amount of time for the people to believe in the change. Therefore, according to Fullan, in order for real change to occur in schools, educators must:

1. Believe the proposed change can occur
2. Believe the proposed change makes sense (meaning)
3. Feel they themselves have a meaningful role in it
4. Experience some success with the change

Fullan recommends professional learning communities as a vehicle for providing effective support for teachers (relationships) as they implement change. While making a compelling case for collaborative practices as a means of supporting improvements in teacher practice, Fullan doesn’t shy away from discussing just how very difficult collaboration has proven to be within schools. He identifies the factors which play against professional learning communities, and provokes the reader to consider, "... we knew specifically and clearly a quarter of a century ago how powerful collaborative or collegial cultures were and how they functioned. Twenty-five years is a long time to sit on knowledge that serves the very moral core of school improvement." (p. 153)

Michael Fullan corroborates what I believe to be the truth about educational change. He says the student must be at the center of all proposed change. He says collaborative practices are the key to sustaining the changes that support student learning. And, he validates these arguments with research. This book has been at my fingertips for three months. I take it everywhere I go. I keep snatching it up and opening to one of the many sticky note marked pages to quote a pertinent paragraph. Frankly, I wish I could memorize the entire contents of the book so as to be able to cite it from memory. So often, when I am "selling" the idea of collaborative practices and the work of the National School Reform Faculty, I am asked if there is anything I can give to the adminis- trators or school board to show that the work is effective. I finally have the tool! I’ve been looking for: The New Meaning of Educational Change, fourth edition.

Diana Watson is the Director of Professional Development for the Center for School Success (CSS) in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. CSS is a non-profit organization established in 2003 to address the needs of students who struggle with learning, so they can achieve measurable success in school and in life. You can contact Diana Watson at diana@watson.com.
In this Issue
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

In this issue of Connections, our director, Steven Strull, shares news of our recent Centers’ Summit and the launch of our new Accountability Council in his report. As we take steps toward long-term sustainability, we are making the road of our mission by walking it together. Read Steven’s analysis of proposed standards for national facilitators that grow out of what we “do” and what we “know” about our work in support of students.

Pedro Bermudez and Linda Emm, two of our Southern Florida hosts for this year’s Winter Meeting, bring us up to date on the state of their work in their Center’s report and welcome us to their state. In addition, in our Living History feature, Linda shares her history as a coach and her hopes and fears about the future of our work.

This issue’s Students at the Center finds Peggy Silva from Southern High sharing her writing and soliciting student feedback around a recent experience of her own, privilege, in her piece, White Privilege DNA.

Kevin Fahey, our Research Director, shares the story of two research studies about the initiation and impact of CFGs for administrators, raising still more questions about the ways we structure interventions and reforms.

Kim Carter and Camilla Greene offer us an eye on their individual experiences occurring in tandem, as colleagues across difference engaged in the ongoing online book chat about the text Courageous Conversations about Race by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton.

Diana Watson shares her perspective about the book “she keeps returning to,” in her review of The New Meaning of Educational Change by Michael Fullan.

Finally, Dave Schmid and Linda Fiorella offer us a glimpse of the power of the circle and their use of protocols and collaborative structures in support of the Juneau community’s struggle to confront educational inequities and design new high schools that are student-centered, in their Protocols in Practice piece, The Power of the Circle in Community Conversations about Equity.

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Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editorial Board: Debbie Bambino, Sarah Childers, Camilla Greene and Greg Peters

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to Connections, contact us at 812.330.2702 or dbambino@earthlink.net

1. Describe the learning environment in a high school that you do not want to see.
2. Describe the learning environment in a high school that you want to see.
3. Describe your student when he/she graduates from high school.
4. What advice do you have for us as we develop a high school educational plan?

Participants wrote their responses on 3x5 note cards and went around the circle as each person shared what he/she wrote. The power of this process was the opportunity for all people to speak and truly be listened to as they presented their different perspectives and hopes and dreams for their students and the school district. Not everyone appreciated this process, especially some from the dominant culture. However, a majority felt that their time spent was much more than token feedback and that it would truly make a difference in any plan that was presented. We collected every 3x5 card and published comments verbatim on the website that was created to make the entire process public and transparent. Advisory Committee members then read every comment from every forum before they began creating proposals for the educational plan.

Several proposals were created, and a second round of community forums was held to enable the public to respond to the proposals. Four themes emerged at these forums and became the guiding principles for our work: Unity, Equity, Personalization, and Choice. Taking the themes from the community forums and what they learned about best practices and high school reform, the Advisory Committee recommended three smaller high schools that included the following key components:

- 9th Grade Learning Communities
- Small Learning Communities Based on Themes in Grades 10-12
- Advisory Program for All
- Flexibility to Move Among Themed Academies
- Core Content/State Standards in All Academies
- Multicultural and Anti-Racist Teaching
- Post-Secondary Preparation for All Students
- Improved Access to and Participation in Expanded Extracurricular Opportunities
- Enrollment Based on Choice and Equity
- Secondary Planning Team

Reaching consensus on this educational plan was a long and difficult process. We were constantly asking ourselves, Will this plan truly make a difference for all students, and especially for Alaska Native and students of poverty? Issues of equity and racism resulted in some hard and arduous conversations. Based on these conversations it was agreed that the key component of multicultural and antiracist teaching should remain at the forefront of the educational plan. After the Advisory Committee came to consensus on the proposal for a high school educational plan, it was unanimously approved by the School Board. The Juneau School District is currently working to implement the plan for the fall of 2009. Continuing, we believe that the educational plan that was created has the potential for improving learning for all students in the Juneau community. After working with this process for over a year, we’ve gained the following insights:

- Without addressing issues around equity, significant change in schools will not be possible.
- Protocols and other structured methods of conversation that we have used with educators and students for years can and do work in community settings.
- Protocols and other similar structures help people from different cultures—engage in difficult and respectful conversations about race.
- Representative student voice is a perspective in school change that must be valued.
- Change, especially when it is focused on the high school, is difficult. Significant high school change, even when the shortcomings become evident and public, does not happen easily.
- Sharing data is a powerful approach to prompting change; however, one must dig deeply to find data that shows the entire picture.
- The community can and should be a powerful voice in creating significant change in schools.

For more information on The Next Generation: Our Kids, Our Community, please visit the website www.nextgenerationjuneau.com.

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The room was very familiar; the scene predictable – we’d been there before but had never been there. A group of NSRF National Facilitators were working, eating, talking, and planning, in critical friendship. We were in Atlanta at the recent Center of Activity Summit, but we could have been anywhere and the thirty or so assembled National Facilitators could have been a very different bunch. But we were there, in Atlanta, to once again take up the conversation of standards and guidelines for National Facilitators, and this time we made real progress.

We met for a day and a half following up on a day-long Accountability Council (AC) meeting where we had gained some clarity around the purposes of our standards – we did not concern ourselves with the technicalities of this or that standard, nor how it would be measured or even what the metrics would be. Instead, from the AC meeting through the summit, we crafted our work in terms of what National Facilitators DO and therefore what they KNOW, as a result of NSRF’s work. We were also very clear in our process – we were not deciding anything; we were working together to clarify our thinking and to propose direction to the National Center as we continue to hone our language and articulate our practice.

We have pages and pages of notes, dutifully typed up by work-study students who know little of our work. We have lots of ideas and we emerged from the summit with five broad themes – standards – to guide us as we continue to tune our language as we begin a process for public review of each National Facilitator’s practice. I offer a reflection on each of the proposed standards, not as definitive, but as representative of the deliberations we are considering as we continue our journey as a national organization.

**Standard #1 – Skills:** I believe this standard begins to address the basic question, what do National Facilitators DO and therefore what do they KNOW? This question turns the typical educational question of what children should know and be able to do on its head, and is borrowed from the essential question asked by Big Picture Company schools. It assumes National Facilitators have some practice in common, that we do certain things – not necessarily particularly – but in general and that as a result of our collective doing we are amassing a knowledge base that is identifiable, reportable, and replicable. Collectively, we generously throw around the best practices language, but in our case, over the years, we have individually and collectively honed our practice toward being able to collectively know. We know about our practice, what works and what doesn’t, how it gets received and why, and in the end, we share a deep belief that to improve student learning and achievement we must learn together as adults. We agree that it takes certain skills, though varied, to do our work and that we can and should articulate those skills as we seek feedback on our practice.

**Standard #2 – Addressing Issues Related to Equity:** Our mission statement says that as an organization we have a commitment to fostering educational and social equity. Those of us who were around for the crafting of this language years ago remember the honest and sometimes tough conversations we had about including this statement in our mission. Over the years we have struggled with the construct of equity.

(continued on page 9)