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## **Collaborating Effectively in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools**

### **Description:**

*Collaborating Effectively in 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools* is a year long professional development series when implemented will further develop a schools collaboration efforts, teaching practices, and support system for faculty. Educators who volunteer for the Critical Friends Group will participate in small study groups of 2-3 educators that will observe, model, share and reflect upon their teaching practices with their fellow group members. The entire group (6-9 members) will meet monthly to discuss their reflections and current educational issues relevant to the participants. The study group members will rotate monthly so that all members will have the opportunity to observe each other throughout the school year. Each CFG meeting is facilitated by a trained coach who leads the educators through the professional discussion. Educators from all content areas and experience levels will benefit from this professional development experience.

### **Research:**

The need for productive, meaningful, and positive ways for teachers to collaborate has intensified as more systematic reforms have emerged due to higher curricula demands and stricter accountability formulas (Peterson, 2002). Despite efforts to maintain highly qualified teachers, a consistent, national practice for teacher collaboration has yet to be implemented.

One strategy that a minority of schools has implemented to enhance professional interactions is the idea of a Critical Friends Group. A Critical Friends Group (CFG) is a professional learning community consisting of approximately 6-8 educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for about 2 hours. CFG's generate effective practices for teacher's to share materials, develop support systems, and promote and support holistic approaches to meeting the teaching and learning needs of schools around the nation (Cromwell, 1999). CFG's are designed to create professional learning communities, make teaching practices explicit through dialogue, and establish a foundation for sustained professional development based on inquiry. CFG's also provide a context to understand educators work with students, relationships with peers, and beliefs about teaching and learning (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). Additionally, when a structured teacher collaboration program is implemented, teachers are more thoughtful about connecting curriculum, assessment, and instruction (Cromwell, 1999). Overall, teachers in Critical Friends Groups believe they can affect student achievement and these teachers have higher expectations for student learning, which, in turn, leads to greater student achievement (Cromwell).

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**Desired Outcomes:**

- Provide a structured collaboration experience to educators of all levels that focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century teachers practice.
- Develop a learning community that 21<sup>st</sup> Century educators model, share, coach and reflects upon available research, practice in teaching, learning, and leadership.
- Provides 21<sup>st</sup> Century educators a forum to self assess and develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards.
- Create and facilitate a learning community that will continue to grow and require substantial time and is driven by a coherent long-term plan.
- Develop a learning community that is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.
- Teachers implementing, leading, sharing and modeling fresh, relevant strategies to promote student success and growth.
- Promote 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educators to develop and lead staff development based on their professional strengths and interests.

**Coaches Time:**

- One hour introduction to CFG's for all staff
- Two Hour training session for the voluntary participants
- Bi-Monthly/Monthly CFG Meetings (1 Hour Each)
- Weekly collaborative support through emails/phone calls

**Participant Time:**

- One hour introduction
- Two hour training session for participants
- 30 minute bi-monthly/monthly teacher focused observations
- 1 hour bi-monthly/monthly group dissemination
- 1 hour bi-monthly/monthly Critical Friends Group Meeting
- 1 hour monthly research, reading, reflections

**Resources Needed:**

- 6-9 voluntary educators of any content area or experience level
- Consistent time (1 hour) and room to meet in bi-monthly/monthly
- Journal notebooks

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**Examples of Educational Topics discussed: (Geared towards schools needs and goals)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Differentiating for Success</li> <li>- Communication within your school</li> <li>- Using assessment Data to write your IEP's/ Curriculum</li> <li>- Creating a Literacy Rich Environment</li> <li>- Celebrating culture in your classroom all year.</li> <li>- Building positive relationships in the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting family involvement</li> <li>- Using Interest Inventories to enhance individual curriculum</li> <li>- Incorporating critical thinking seminars</li> <li>- Finding resources</li> <li>- Using and creating student friendly rubrics</li> <li>- Engaging students</li> </ul>
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**Example of CFG Cycle**

Coach Responsibility	Teacher Responsibility
<b>Cycle 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction/ CFG training</li> <li>- Establish a consistent meeting place</li> <li>- Establish a consistent meeting time and day per month to hold Study Groups</li> <li>- Needs Assessments of participants</li> <li>- Divide the participants into their first group of 3</li> </ul>	<b>With CFG group of 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set Observation Times</li> <li>- Set Observation Focus</li> <li>- Post Observation Discussion Time</li> </ul> <b>Before Next Study Group:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Observe both members with partner</li> <li>- Have post observation discussion</li> <li>- Prepare relevant materials to share at CFG study group meeting</li> </ul>
<b>Cycle 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opening reflection question in journal</li> <li>- Share opening reflection</li> <li>- Lead Study Group Sharing – keep discussion on track (what...so what... now what...) coach when needed.</li> <li>- Introduce topic through video, visual, article (i.e. using data to organize, plan IEP's)</li> <li>- Lead discussion</li> <li>- Divide members into new groups of 3</li> <li>- Ending journal entry</li> </ul>	<b>With study Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bring journal, portfolio, materials to Study group</li> <li>- 2 Reflections in journal (pre/post study group)</li> <li>- Share learning with group from observations</li> <li>- Keep discussion about YOUR learning</li> </ul> <b>With new CFG group of 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set Observation Times</li> <li>- Set New Observation Focus</li> <li>- Post Observation Discussion Time</li> </ul> <b>Before Next Study Group:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Observe both members with partner</li> <li>- Have post observation discussion</li> <li>- Prepare relevant materials to share at CFG study group meeting</li> </ul>