

# THE TUNING PROTOCOL

National School Reform Faculty

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The TUNING PROTOCOL is best suited to look at particular teacher or school-created projects and assessments in order to improve them. So, for example, it is often used to look at writing prompts, open-ended problems, and other kinds of assignments, research project designs, and rubrics for all kinds of activities and projects. It is less effective in learning in depth about a particular student's understanding, interests, or skills; for these purposes, the structure of the Collaborative Assessment Conference would serve better.

The focus of a Tuning Protocol is on a piece of curriculum, instruction, or assessment selected by the presenting teacher. Typically, the teacher chooses something because some of the students weren't successful. The goal is to help the presenting teacher to improve, or "fine tune," that piece of his or her curriculum or assessment (thus the name, Tuning Protocol), so that all students meet the expectations. If a presenter wants to revise something he or she has done, the structure of the Tuning Protocol will likely provide useful feedback.

\* The scope of the group's work is determined, at least in part, by a "focusing question" framed in advance by the presenting teacher. For example, "How does this project support students' application and development of critical thinking skills in math?"

\* A range of student work (typically, from several students at different levels of accomplishment) is presented to inform the group's understanding and help the group "tune" the piece of curriculum/assessment identified by the presenting teacher. The presenter should bring enough copies of the student work, the assignment or prompt, the assessment tool or rubric, and the student learning goals, standards or expectations.

\* A crucial part of the tuning comes through "warm" and "cool" feedback offered to the presenting teacher by the participants (after they've heard about the instructional context and looked at the student work). The feedback tries to respond to the presenting teacher's focusing question but is not limited by it.

\* "Warm" feedback asks participants to identify strengths, both in the teacher-created piece of instruction or assessment and in the student work; "cool" feedback asks participants to identify possible gaps between the teacher's goals for the work and the students' accomplishment—and ways these gaps might be closed.

- \* The presenting teacher listens to the full range of feedback without responding immediately. Instead, in the next step, she is asked to reflect on what she heard. In this step, the other participants listen and don't interrupt.
  
- \* A final step calls for all the participants to "debrief" the conversation, considering how the structure helped them achieve the goals for the protocol.