California teachers are changing the culture of their schools. The CTA Institute for Teaching acknowledges this critical work by identifying our own website as teacherdrivenchange.com. But, what if “teacher-driven” literally described the work of teachers who drive off campus to visit the homes of their students?

That’s what’s happening in a number of school communities around California, and particularly in Sacramento City Schools, with the support of the Sacramento-based Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project. During the past three years, IFT and CTA formally partnered with the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project to help their expansion to new school communities.

Home visits work and teachers have always done them. That practice has been enhanced with a strategic focus and collaboration dedicated to this proven strategy with positive outcomes for families, staff, and most importantly, students of all grade levels.

The concept is simple. Rather than blaming each other, teachers and parents come together, in a unique setting, as equal partners, to build trust and form a relationship where they can take the time to share dreams, expectations, experiences, and tools regarding the child’s academic success.

Once a relationship is formed, the partners are empowered, finding accountability with each other to make the necessary changes to ensure that students experience academic and social success. Independent evaluations of home visit efforts show increased student attendance rates, increased test scores, decreased suspension/expulsion rates and vandalism at sites.

Earl Warren Elementary is located in SE Sacramento and enrolls approximately 500 students from the surrounding middle-class and lower-middle class neighborhood. The students are part of three numerically significant subgroups for API testing purposes: Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (68%); Hispanic or Latino (62%) and Asian (21%).

In addition to the active participation of Warren teachers in the parent home visit project, students at Warren are looped with the same teacher for three years in grades 4-6.

According to CDE, Earl Warren’s API scores have risen steadily since 2001, from 606 to 806. This 33% increase has moved the school from Decile 3 to Decile 6 and, in similar schools ranking, they are in Decile 10.
Is “Race To Nowhere” the Anti-Superman?
The Film Has Provided a Different Context for Education Reform Debate

They come by the dozens, by the hundreds, by the thousands. They come to local school auditoriums, libraries, and churches in California and communities all over the United States. The come to see a film about students, parents and teachers and they leave determined to set up a screening in their own local community.

From Cupertino to Vacaville; Palo Alto to La Jolla; Malibu to Chula Vista- CTA members have responded enthusiastically to the film. Over 225 recently attended an IFT-sponsored screening at the February CTA State Council meeting. More than 350 viewed the film in January at the Issues Conference in Las Vegas and many hung around afterwards for a discussion with Vicky Abeles, the film’s director.

Abeles is a concerned mother turned filmmaker. She aims her camera at the high-stakes, high-pressure culture that has invaded our schools and our children’s lives, creating unhealthy, disengaged, unprepared and stressed-out youth. Featuring the heartbreaking stories of young people in all types of communities who have been pushed to the brink, educators who are burned out and worried that students aren’t developing the skills they need, and parents who are trying to do what’s best for their kids, Race to Nowhere points to the silent epidemic in our schools: cheating has become commonplace; students are disengaged; stress-related illness and depression are rampant; and many young people arrive at college and the workplace unprepared and uninspired.

School reform has become an urgent national issue and 2010 was the year of the education film. Race to Nowhere is the only film that shows what is actually happening to our kids as a result of current policies and practices obsessed with testing, performance and competition rather than meaningful teaching and learning. Race to Nowhere finally gives voice to those on the front lines who are most affected by education policies - the students and teachers themselves. Race to Nowhere is the only film to spotlight the intersection of health and education. The film empowers everyone to get involved and take ownership of what’s happening in our schools and communities.

“Race to Nowhere shines a light on the crisis of learning and meaning facing American education. The film is both a call to arms and a beacon of hope, a source of relief and outrage and a way forward for all of us.”

For more information, visit: www.racetonowhere.com-
or go to www.facebook.com/RaceToNowhere

The deadline for this year’s IFT Grant application is April 30, 2011.
Please look for an on-line application beginning in March 2011.
For more information, visit IFT’s website- www.teacherdrivenchange.org