Why do some students drop out of high school, while others from similar backgrounds succeed and thrive as they move on to graduation?

This essential question has guided work at Merced High School over the past two years as students and staff have united to reduce dropouts at this 116-year-old institution. Under terms of a $100,000 Hewlett Foundation grant, IFT continues to support these efforts.

In late September, IFT staff participated in two days of Positive Deviance training at Merced High. Day One saw over one hundred students, who have been recruited as program participants, discuss and act out behaviors that are available to all and enhance chances of graduating.

Day Two was devoted to hands-on work with ten MHS teachers who have stepped up in 2011-12 to serve as Positive Deviance Mentors. Among the group is MHS librarian, Sarah Morgan, who is in her second year in the program. Sarah role-played with her colleagues to improve the questioning skills they need to use in their weekly encounters with the PD students.

Sheila Whitley, the local MUHSD Association President, also teaches Math at Merced High and has been active in the program since its 2009 inception. Whitley and Morgan work with IFT Staff Consultant Anita Benitas to organize activities and promote involvement in the Positive Deviance program. More than two dozen Merced teachers, administrators and support staff have played an active role in this one-of-a-kind educational program over the past 2½ years. According to Mark Munger, consultant with the Positive Deviance Initiative at Tufts University, the PD process allows the local school community to uncover solutions that can be applied to all. He believes that the Merced project is the only such program currently being tried in any educational institution in the U.S. For more information, please click on the Positive Deviance link on the Institute for Teaching website: www.teacherdrivencchange.org.
IFT’s Regional Teacher Think Tanks Taking Shape

Can thinking teachers shake up the conversation? Seldom are these teachers asked for their opinions about their chosen profession or the major issues that confront public education in the United States and in California. IFT believes that the time has come to ask. We plan to create a structure to do that in a systematic and respectful way.

Beginning in 2012, the CTA Institute for Teaching would like to invite a diverse set of teachers to be part of the IFT Regional Think Tanks.

We know that CTA is blessed with some of the brightest, most innovative people. They work daily in classrooms and schools all over the state. Women and men from all backgrounds, create, invent and discover their way into the minds of children and young adults every day. Often, without any celebrity, our members are developing new structures, procedures and practices to improve the teaching and learning environment.

**Think tank participants are CTA members who are exceptional practitioners and who also see the BIG PICTURE.**

Please contact IFT at 619-683-3990 or Dgale@cta.org to nominate a member to participate in the Regional Think Tanks.