IFT Teacher Think Tanks are systematically and respectfully soliciting the “Voice of the Teacher” on a statewide basis

The February 29th reflections of several of the Fresno participants about the Teacher Think Tank experience provides an interesting glimpse into the thought processes of some of California’s most highly capable classroom practitioners:

“CTA (we) should protect the teaching as much as we protect the teacher.”

“Educators should be having input into educational policies and practices at the local, state, and higher levels.”

“Although I understand the importance of CTA’s involvement in politics, we must put as much effort and focus into the importance of the craft of teaching… we need to be our own advocates and control our profession. We’ve lost focus of education ourselves.”

“The public education system for non-disabled children could benefit from a thorough understanding of IDEA.”

“Teachers should have more direct, integrated involvement in creating the programs we are expected to implement. CTA should fight for increased teacher participation in development of the assessments by which we will be judged.”

“The program re-enforces the artistry and professionalism of teaching, by focusing on students developing a love for learning.”

Over the course of the past 3 ½ months, nearly five dozen CTA members from around the state have gathered together to engage in conversations in more than 20 Regional Teacher Think Tank meetings convened by the CTA Institute for Teaching.

The basic principles of the Think Tank Approach are:
- Through strength-based thinking we create a highly intensive and energizing conversation.
- We can improve the teaching and learning process through conversations.
- Change does not occur in a coherent, linear fashion.
- Conversations may appear to be chaotic, discontinuous, undetermined.
- Asking “Why Not” can be a powerful tool.
- Novelty can be valued over consensus.

What is Strength-based Thinking? It is focusing on what works and ignoring deficits. It is seeking objections and alternatives. It is believing that untapped valuable resources are everywhere. It is understanding that discovery begins with a single question. It is finding what we seek.
As Three-Year Positive Deviance Grant ends, Merced High Students, Teachers and Administrators Reaffirm Their Mutual Commitment to Positively Affecting the Future

(Above) MHS Positive Deviance students gather for a group photo during their end-of-year field trip to Monterey, California. (At right) Students listen to a CSU Monterey student as he discusses college life on the 1,387-acre campus. The school, which is one mile from the shores of Monterey Bay, between the Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula, offers 22 undergraduate degrees.

The 5,000-student university, which became the 21st CSU campus in 1994, prides itself on making higher education accessible to traditionally underserved (38%) and low-income (33%) populations. Nearly seventy percent of students receive some form of financial aid. Fifty-one percent of students are among the first generation of their family to go to college. 52 percent live on campus.

(Below Right) Sarah Morgan, MHS Library Teacher, helped organize the field trip with advice of one of her former students who now attends the university. Being able to dip their toes into the Pacific Ocean was a memorable occasion that capped a busy year for students engaged in the Merced High PD program.

As the Hewlett Foundation High School Dropout Reduction grant comes to an end on June 30, 2012, members of the Merced High School community are beginning to assess the impact of the three-year effort initiated by the Institute for Teaching in response to a request from an activist group of MHS staff members that attended an IFT-sponsored Dropout Conference in 2008.

Dr. Courtney Malloy, senior researcher from Vital Research in Los Angeles, is working with school and district administrators to gather key data regarding student academic performance, attendance and discipline. In addition, she has surveyed dozens of MHS students and staff members, as well as interviewing Consultant-extraordinaire Mark Munger of the Positive Deviance Initiative at Tufts University in Massachusetts. Munger joined IFT staff for a final visit to the high school in April; thirty-eight months after the program began with a meeting of key MHS stakeholders.