The Algebra Success Academy held its annual Summer Institute in Natomas in June. Teachers, as well as other school support staff, gathered for eight days of professional development led by Wendy Gallimore, ASA Lead Teacher and Marlene Bell, ASA Program Director. Part of the program involved a Family Math Night at the Roberts Family Center. ASA Fellows Katie Kennedy, Vinson Canady, Tony Ossola (above left), Michelle Raley (center right) and IFT Board Member Toby Boyd (above right) interact with parents and students using playing cards to teach mathematical concepts. The intensive academic training allowed ASA Fellows Jennifer Holmes, Julieanne Neal, Catherine Roller, Norma Torres, Vinson Canady and Tony Ossola (center left) to learn from each other. The Fellows also got a chance to interact with family and community leaders Darrell Roberts (below left) and Robert Ellis (below right) and his son Myles, a former ASA student soon to be entering eighth grade in Twin Rivers USD.
More on the Algebra Success Academy-
For the past 3 years the California Teachers Association Institute for Teaching has supported a teacher-driven pilot project developed by a teacher leader in Twin Rivers Unified School District trained in the work of Bob Moses (The Algebra Project, Inc.). The Algebra Success Academy’s philosophy is to support diverse students in successful access to Algebra, a gateway subject for many career paths. The instructional approach employs techniques for improving math instruction in a culturally and ethnically diverse school setting.

This approach stresses (1) using real world examples to encourage students to understand the application of algebra and other math concepts, (2) improving teachers’ ability to communicate concepts in culturally sensitive and relevant ways, and (3) encouraging family participation in supporting their student’s math learning and building community between families and the school.

The teacher, Ms. Wendy Gallimore, has piloted these techniques and lessons in her own classroom, as well as collaborated with and guided fellow teachers in testing these approaches in their classrooms and in afterschool settings. She has also adapted Algebra Project curriculum materials and developed new content more appropriate for use with a younger student population. Preliminary results suggest that these approaches have positive impacts on teachers, students, and families to both build community and encourage student learning and engagement.

Strength-Based Educational Approaches and Character Strengths Tackled in Appreciative Inquiry Workshop

What would a classroom look like if all of the students were flourishing? What would a school look like if all of the teachers and other school staff were flourishing?

For the answer, we need to look at the definition of “flourish.” 1. To grow well or luxuriantly; thrive. 2. To do or fare well; prosper. 3. To be in a period of highest productivity, excellence, or influence.

Sounds like an ideal place to learn or to work, doesn’t it? Flourishing is the goal of positive psychology, a recent branch of psychology whose purpose was summed up by Martin Seligman as a psychology of positive human functioning.

Believing that this method blends well with IFT’s strength-based approach to change, IFT staff participated in a 2-day workshop to determine its applicability to education. They discovered that the exploration of character strengths in schools yielded “P-E-R-M-A”: positive emotions, increased engagement, more positive relationships, and a deeper sense of meaning and accomplishment for students.

Please contact IFT to explore possibilities in your school.

Emeritus staff Yale Wishnick (right) and IFT Manager Dick Gale (left) joined psychologists Claire Fialkov and David Haddad in June for an Appreciative Inquiry training in Boston. The eclectic group of participants, shown above in front of the Charles River, included several counseling professionals, a thoracic surgeon, a nursing teacher, the president of a home for abused children and a corporate coach. Despite different working environments, all shared a common belief in the efficacy of positive psychology and strength-based approaches to change.