IFT Grant Recipients Provide Real-World, Locally-Based Examples of Strength-Based Teacher-Driven Change

Three hundred CTA members from around the state gathered at UCLA in early August for a highly productive week of reflection about teacher leadership and the Common Core Standards.

IFT was proud to be a part of the IPD Strand of the CTA Summer Institute and honored that IPD staff wanted to showcase the IFT Grant Program as part of their five-day extravaganza of stimulating speakers, thoughtful discussions and local planning.

Outstanding educators from all over California had an opportunity to hear first-hand from five exemplary grant recipients from the program’s first two years. They each described how CTA members’ voluntary dues contributions to the CTA Foundation for Teaching and Learning were transformed into tangible benefits for their students and schools.

The IFT Grant Program was established in 2009 and has awarded twenty-three educator and chapter grants during its first two years.

Important IFT Grant dates for the 2013 school year:

- Applications are due by the end of April
- Proposals are scored in May
- Recommendations are approved in June
- Grant checks are mailed in August

For the 2012-2013 school year, the Institute for Teaching has awarded thirty-three Educator and Chapter grants totaling $362,000.

Bill Sammons
Black Oak Mine TA
Highly Effective Teaching & Inquiry-Based PLC
$19,440

Mariana Robles
Riverside City TA
Arts & Technology
K-6 Strand
$4,925

Cynthia Soares
Gridley TA
Building Brain
Smart Skills-
$4,995

John Alvarez
Norwalk-La Mirada TA
Green Jobs & Solar Academy-
$30,000 (2 years)

Cheryl Suliteanu
Oceanside TA
Teachers Enhancing Accomplished Methods-
$6,000

Pictured at the 2012 CTA Summer Institute with five IFT Grant Recipients (from left to right), Bill Sammons, Mariana Robles, Cheryl Suliteanu, Cynthia Soares and John Alvarez, are IFT Staff members Anita Benitas (center) and Dick Gale (far right). All of these CTA members were part of school or district-wide project teams that received IFT grants in 2010-11 or 2011-12.
Institute for Teaching and the Staff of Anaheim’s Gauer Elementary Envision Their Dream School

When Anaheim Elementary EA members Virginia Tibbetts and Amy Asaoka-Nakakihara joined one of the eight regional Teacher Think Tanks convened by the CTA Institute for Teaching last spring, little did they know that the impact of the endeavor would hit so close to home.

Now, with the beginning of the 2012-13 school year, Amy and Virginia are leading a strength-based teacher driven transformation at their own school, Gauer Elementary.

With the assistance of IFT staff members Anita Benitas and Yale Wishnick, nearly all of the school’s certificated and classified staff participated in a process designed to envision Gauer as a Dream School.

AEEA President Kristen Fisher joined more than forty administrators, classified and certificated staff members at Gauer Elementary for their opening day staff meeting. In the end, the session not only instilled hope, but also confidence that positive changes can be made. The staff agreed that the right focus will create the right results.

The school-wide process was strongly supported by the Gauer Principal, Debbie Schroeder. She encouraged teachers to begin talking with their students about personal strengths.

To demonstrate her personal commitment to the process, she also spoke to students at an all-school assembly. All were glued to their seats, listening to their Principal discuss and advocate for the power of dreams and using strengths in their classrooms.

At the conclusion of the August 17th session, a teacher correctly summarized the essence of the undertaking in one question.

He asked, “So let me see, when you boil today’s session down, we are really talking about the importance and value of the individual classroom teacher to the school change process. And that the teacher has a lot of talents and strengths that can improve our school. Is that right?”

Precisely.