Teacher Think Tank Conference Explores Strength-Based Connections

Nearly four dozen CTA members meet and share their ideas about teacher driven change.

Exemplary teachers from around California and their IFT supporters joined together in April for the first-ever IFT Teacher Think Tank Conference at the CTA Headquarters in Burlingame. The statewide get together was the culmination of more than fifty regional Teacher Think Tank meetings that have been held since February 2012. These smaller groups gathered every 6-8 weeks in eight locations around the state—San Diego, Moreno Valley, Monrovia, Oxnard, Fresno, Natomas, San Jose and Oakland. Their charge was to bring the voice of the practitioner to state and local discussions around school change.

The CTA members who comprise IFT’s eight regional Teacher Think Tanks have strong opinions. That was one of the reasons they were recruited last year to participate in the newly-established Teacher Think Tanks around the state. The goal was to bring excellent classroom practitioners together to have facilitated discussions about the big issues facing the teaching profession and public education, in general. Although conversations and topics varied from location to location, a common theme began to emerge when all of the participants came together in one room.

By the end of the second day, the group had honed its message and focused on making recommendations on how CTA can become a more strength-based organization. The “Top Ten” suggestions are:

- Start Teacher Driven Strength-based Charter Schools;
- Continue Strength-based Teacher Driven Change through member release and enhanced communication with each other;
- Articulate clear alternatives to Standards Test-based Accountability;
- Local level Strength-based training;
- Bring success stories to public;
- Provide Teacher Driven Strength-based change training: hijack teacher prep;
- Frame our own message;
- Follow the guild model to utilize the expertise of teacher leaders; and
- Promote a Strength-based State Council.

Barnett Berry (center), Executive Director of the North Carolina-based Center for Teaching Quality discusses how teacher leadership can be tapped to improve educational outcomes for all students. He urged teacher think tank members and teacher unions to feel a sense of urgency about the importance of bringing about the kind of changes we would like to see.

As part of the World Café activity, San Diego Think Tank members Jennifer Moon and KT Martin (seated) and Samantha Carr of Monrovia (standing), listen as Dani Tucker of the Monrovia Think Tank (right) discusses how to get the word out about what is great about our profession.
The Two Newest Board Members Help Put the “Teaching” in the Institute for Teaching

The Institute for Teaching is proud to welcome two CTA members to serve on the IFT Board of Directors. Both are outstanding teaching practitioners and their contributions and insights have already been hugely beneficial to the work of the IFT.

Michelle Ramos, of the Covina Unified Education Association, has been a teacher for 22 years in the Covina-Valley USD. She currently teaches 8th-grade Physical Science and 8th-grade Mentoring/Intervention at Traweek Middle School. She has her Master’s in Science Instruction from USC and a Certificate in Adolescent Intervention from University of La Verne.

“I am a single mother of two amazing, nearly adult, children, and their passions, by extension, become mine.” These passions include participation in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer (her team raised $18,000 this year) and all things soccer-related. She is a player, coach and referee, as well as a fan.

Eric Enriquez has been teaching in the Hayward USD since 2000. A member of the Hayward TA, he currently serves as a Mathematics Instructional Coach at Burbank Elementary.

IFT Board President Dean Vogel welcomes the two newest members of the IFT Board of Directors at the April Board meeting in Burlingame. Eric Enriquez (left) and Michelle Ramos (right) collectively bring thirty five years of classroom experience to IFT's program.

A father and husband, Eric is a strong advocate for productive and purposeful teacher collaboration. He is interested in Project Based Learning because of its organic and real world approach to student learning.

Palm Springs TA Member Wants the Record to Reflect the Hard Work of the Entire Desert Springs MS Staff

Editor’s Note: The April IFT Newsletter published a story about the success of two IFT Grants received this year by the Palm Springs Teachers Association. One of their members, Mary Gambrall, wrote to us to correct what she feels was a misleading impression created by the article. IFT regrets the error.

“Desert Springs Middle School received a grant from IFT to support a program led by dedicated and caring teachers and staff. The program was an expansion of the Culinary Institute created and led by Michael Grainger in the 2011 and 2012 school year. The grant enabled us to add a paid staff member, Susan Kovac, to assist Mr. Grainger and allow more students to benefit from this worthy program.

An evening with parents and deserving students to celebrate outstanding academic achievement for current 7th and 8th graders based on last year’s CST scores was held in March. Not only did DSMS want to honor these exceptional young people but the staff wanted to motivate them to continue to do their best.

Many staff members worked hard to give these students and their parents an elegant yet exciting evening that celebrated their hard work. While all of the staff and administrators supported this evening, we would like to give special thanks to Jessica Simpson and her wonderful ASB students, Lloyd Chaisson, Gary Cable, Jody Diaz, Andreea Pacak, Steve and Darcy Seyfert, Amy Lond and Vivian Hernandez. A special thanks to Anita Benitas and Dick Gale of IFT.”