Teacher-Marlaina Schroeder has a very good idea of how staff members at River City High School can provide critical assistance to high school students. After all, she was a student herself as recently as 2005 at Fallbrook High School in San Diego County.

Now, as a fourth-year science teacher in West Sacramento, Marlaina is working closely with colleague Cristina Buss to provide after-school academic support to students whose grades are at-risk.

Thanks to the support and advocacy of Don Stauffer, President of the 425-member Washington TA, the program she created, called Academic Outreach is now the recipient of a $15,000 Chapter Grant.

At a recent Board of Education meeting, WUSD Board members listened intently as several RCHS students reported on the positive outcomes of the program. Board member Mary Leland remarked that “AO should stand for awesome and over-the-top.” Strong appreciation was expressed for the dedication of the teachers and the peer tutors who assist in the program. “You are making a huge difference in students’ lives,” said Board member Katie Villegas.

This teacher driven work began two years ago with the two science teachers and has now grown to include over a dozen staff members. They supervise students from 3:30-5:00 p.m. in their classrooms, as well as in the school library. Their target audience is students with a grade-point average of 1.5 or less.

The grant funds were used to provide planning and collaboration time, as well as support for parent calls and student supervision. Schroeder and Buss believe the program is replicable; indeed a school team from Denver has planned a visit. According to the teachers, the school district has also supported the program by providing late bus service for students four days a week. President Stauffer added that both the Association and the Board want the program to be part of their LCAP.

As part of the IFT Grant Program, teachers and IFT staff visit all of the 2013-14 grant recipients to discover their learnings. The River City HS visitation group included (from left), Anita Benitas and Dick Gale of IFT and three members of the IFT Teacher Think Tanks, Lysa Sassman (Natomas), Dave Orphal and Tara Kajtaniak (Eastbay).
IFT Grant Recipients, Students and Parents Share What's Working with CTA Members

Three current IFT Grant recipients and their guests shared highlights of their strength-based projects with interested teachers and certificated support staff at the CTA Good Teaching Conference in Anaheim in March. Workshop participants clearly felt the passion driving these grant projects, although the projects themselves could not have been more different. The presentations made it clear to those in attendance that our classroom teachers know how to build on students’ strengths to enhance student achievement and those plans can come to life when they are given resources and support. IFT considers all three grants to be positive examples of teacher driven change.

Nicole Robinson, a dance teacher from A.B. Miller High School in Fontana, described the incredible growth in her students’ performance skills, academic focus and self-confidence, all as a result of project activities included in her $5,000 Riverside Trolley Dance grant proposal. According to Riverside Trolley Dance organizers, the A. B. Miller Dance students’ participation in both the production and performance aspects of the two-year-old program was essential to its growth and success.

Kelly Iwamoto, of the Inglewood TA, talked about how their initial 2012-13 IFT grant gave the staff at Bennett-Kew Elementary School a real opportunity to forge a tighter bond with their local parents. She explained that the $20,000 Parent University grant provided time for interested teachers to meet with parents to determine their needs. That led to strong staff collaboration around planning the agendas for their monthly meetings and occasional field trips. With a second-year grant award in 2013-14, began the work to establish a Parent University at a second elementary school in the District this year.

Norma Williamson, a World Languages teacher at La Mirada High School, talked about the enhancements she has been able to make over the past four years to her Green Jobs program. Working in partnership with IFT, the District, local businesses and other agencies like the AQMD, the teacher has been able to provide hands-on opportunities for students to work in real-world settings, as well as collaborating to build a solar-powered golf cart, bicycles, go karts and a fully functioning electric car. This year’s $20,000 grant follows three previous IFT grants totaling $50,000.