IFT Teacher Think Tank Members Gather in Burlingame to Reaffirm Their Belief in Strength-Based Teacher Leadership

Participants in the 2nd Annual Teacher Think Tank Conference focused on the recently-published CTA Long Range Strategic Plan which recognizes that “building a stronger union will require an expanded group of educators who are integrally engaged in their local schools, their local unions, and their local communities.” Think Tank members agree that they must work throughout California to engage with this expanded group of educators and to help broaden the definition of “teacher leadership” within our union.

Professor Charles Kerchner, who has been writing about teachers and their unions for the past twenty-five years, spoke about the challenges and opportunities in California, a state he has described as an “Education Outlier”. He told participants that by focusing on the common core and local control and accountability, California is intentionally sideling aspects of the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top agenda. He believes that IFT’s approach of discovering and building on teacher and school strength and creating capacity building rather than punishment fits in well with the state’s approach to educational change.

(Above left) Charles Shannon, Eric Enriquez and Michelle Ramos lead a discussion about how CTA can become a more strength-based organization, Ramos and Enriquez also serve on the IFT Board of Directors. (Above right) Think Tankers listen as Charles Kerchner discusses the complex factors at work in the school “reform” process. He recognizes the differing opinions both inside and outside of our union, but believes that the Strategic Plan is an excellent framework to move forward. (Below center) CTA Vice-President Eric Heins spent time with the group answering questions and talking about how critical it is to shift the social narrative on education reform toward a student-centered agenda that fully incorporates the insights and expertise of education professionals.
Teacher Leadership: What Can WE Do?

In April, more than three dozen members of IFT’s regional Teacher Think Tanks spent two days together discussing their shared vision of how active and informed classroom experts can play a critical role in “taking back our profession.” Said one, “Being here makes me feel like I am part of something greater and have the power to make real strength-based change run by practitioners, and not outsiders or administration.” On the back, you can find out more about how these CTA members are pushing for opportunities to demonstrate the efficacy of teacher leadership at the local level, in their districts and schools statewide.


IFT Receives a Record-Number of Grant Applications from CTA Members to Support Strength-Based Teacher Driven Change in 2014-15

The IFT Grant program is alive and well. The 118 grant applications received as of the April 30th deadline represent a 71% increase over last year’s grant program. CTA members from Kindergarten through CSU submitted proposals. The wide variety of grant topics is reflected in some of the project titles: Change the World, Northview’s Renaissance, Full STEAM Ahead, Just Keep Running, Lego My Robot, Shakespearepalooza, Giving a Voice, and Can Grit be Taught?

The process of sorting through the proposals now falls to the IFT Grant Selection Committee, which meets May 9-11 in Oakland. The Committee includes teachers Barry Wissman (Palm Springs), Dave Orphal (Oakland), Carlos Solis (Ontario-Montclair) and Kelly Iwamoto (Inglewood). In addition, Principal Liane Cismowski (Mt. Diablo) and Anita Benitas (IFT Staff) will join in the deliberations. They will use the IFT Strength-Based Matrix as the lens to judge each grant proposal.

Grant recommendations will be brought to the IFT Board of Directors for approval in June. Grant funds will be sent to local Associations during the summer to enable our 2014-15 grant recipients to get an early start implementing their grant projects. Stay tuned for more details on the 2014-15 grant recipients.