

CTA Institute for Teaching

CTA Board Report:
November 2014

Moving the Conversation from Weakness to Strength

*The San Diego Teacher Think Tank has a Plan to Transform Our Profession
by Promoting a Whole-Student, Strength-Based Education System*



The Think Tank members articulated their mission: “Through sustainable teacher driven change, we celebrate the creation of an educational community that is inquiry driven, collaborative, and promotes creative thinking by providing teachers with the freedom and support to be GREAT; we operate from a strength-based, optimistic position where teachers are the facilitators in taking back the schools for the future of our students.”

Here are IFT’s Seven Factors Driving a School Culture of Success

Future Oriented – Students have a dramatic, positive image of the future.

Work Oriented - Work is valued, purposeful, and relevant to students.

Student Centered - Emphasis is placed on learning over teaching.

School Family Relations - Parents are strong partners in the teaching and learning process and are encouraged to be involved in their children’s education.

School-Wide Relations - All school stakeholders are responsible for the education of each student.

Student Relations - Students view other students as supportive and interested in their well-being.

Results Oriented - Students understand that strength-based thinking increases capacity and resilience to achieve goals.

Their mission seems impossible. But, the eight members of IFT’s San Diego Teacher Think Tank are not easily dissuaded. They even wrote an ambitious mission statement (see sidebar) to support their belief that school transformation is sustainable only when it is teacher-driven and based on what’s working, not what’s broken.

These San Diego County CTA members include:

Dominic Dirksen (H.S.-Science), **KT Martin** (M.S.-English), **Jennifer Moon** (M.S.-Science/Social Studies), **Molly O’Hara** (M.S.-Math/Special Education), **Jennifer Skellett** (4th grade), **Dana Tomlinson** (6th grade), **Michele Ward** (4th grade) and **Serina West** (Kindergarten).

So, they wrote a book. An “e-book” to be precise. It is currently available on the IFT Website (www.teacherdrivenchange.org) and all members are encouraged to read it and to follow its links to find out how to create this new reality in our schools.

The Think Tank members, focusing on making public education work for kids, their futures and all of our futures, asked several important questions:

- How can we connect & participate in innovative ways?
- What would schools be like if we approached teaching and learning from a strength-based perspective?
- How can we create teaching and learning laboratories?
- How will the teaching profession change if teachers become “teacherpreneurs?”

Their vision includes a strong focus on student strengths, changes in school governance, collaboration with current research, project based learning, authentic teacher collaboration, real home/school engagement and a focus on grit.

They wrote: *“Being future-oriented, it is (our) desire to use this document to assist all educators who serve in either public and/or charter school capacities. As facilitators or consultants, our goal as Think Tank members is to use this this document’s strength-based philosophies as a tool to enhance best practices already being utilized in schools. This document will be made available to all educators and LEAs to use to further support the goals of CTA’s Strategic Plan regarding leadership development and transforming our profession by promoting a whole-student, strength-based education system.”*

Teacher-Driven Change: The Future for Transforming the Profession?

The Institute for Teaching strongly supports the **CTA Long-Range Strategic Plan**, which asserts that “fulfilling the mission of CTA and 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.”

IFT attends all regional and statewide CTA Conferences to have critical conversations with our members around the important ideas presented in the plan.

The Institute for Teaching believes it can play an important part in working throughout the state to engage with this expanded group of educators and to help broaden the definition of “teacher leadership” within our union.

“This Strategic Plan...recognizes all education professionals for the experts they are; calls for facilitating networks to develop professional capital within CTA; acknowledges the importance of instructional leadership within the union...”

IFT offers a workshop on how “Teacher-Driven Change” is the key to transforming the profession. Members are invited to learn more about how teacher-driven creativity, passion and innovation can create new opportunities for teaching and learning. The session provides an overview of how the CTA Institute for Teaching’s strength-based approach has empowered members to drive change from the ground level.

IFT grants can provide resources to tap into the passions that our members feel for their work in their classrooms, at their school sites, and within their communities. IFT is working to assist our unions in having a real voice in school transformation by supporting our members as the shape the future of teaching and public education in California.



Classroom teachers, certificated support staff members and chapter leaders (above) gathered to learn more about the IFT at the recent Region 2 Leadership Conference in Reno, NV. The goal of the Saturday workshop was to help make the connection between the work of our union and the work of our members in their classrooms and at their school sites. Since 2009, IFT has been utilizing CTA members’ voluntary dues contributions to fund strength-based teacher driven projects at schools all over California. All CTA members are eligible to apply for grants up to \$20,000.



As IFT Staff Consultant Anita Benitas looked on, 2014-15 Grant recipient Lisa Greenhow of the Oakdale TA (above right with her mother Kristy Seibert) discussed her “Full Steam Ahead!” project (\$4,990).

IFT was pleased that several Region 2 grant recipients stopped by the IFT table to discuss their grant projects. These members are building on the strengths of their local school communities.

(Below) Merced High School teachers Rich Sandoval and Joel Sebastian discussed the impact of their back-to-back Social Studies grants- “Voices-An Oral History Project” (\$5,000) in 2012-13 and the “Summer History Institute Program” (\$19,500) in 2013-14. Both projects brought the students closer to the individuals who helped to shape the history of Merced and the Central Valley.

For the 2015-16 school year, the grant application period opens on January 1, 2015. Applications are due no later than April 30, 2015. The Grant Selection Committee will meet in May. The Committee uses the IFT Strength-based Matrix as the lens to evaluate the proposals. To date, 128 grant projects totaling more than \$1.2 million have been awarded.



Central Valley Think Tank & Writer’s Project Literacy Event- November 8, 2014- Fresno
IFT Board of Directors Meeting- November 20, 2014- Burlingame
High Desert Service Center Fall Leadership Conf. - November 21-23, 2015- Las Vegas