Strength-Based IFT Grants Create Powerful Opportunities for Student, Parent and Community Engagement

When Paso Robles teacher Anna Mumford applied for an IFT Grant last year, she was hoping to fund a Green Garden project for her 4th-grade students. Little did she know that her small classroom project would literally blossom into a full blown school-based garden with deep community support.

Anna was one of four IFT Grant recipients who described how their grant projects became a catalyst for school wide improvement. They talked of unanticipated connections to their colleagues and other supporters within the school community.

These outstanding practitioners shared highlights of their strength-based projects with interested teachers and certificated support staff at this year’s two CTA Good Teaching Conferences in San Jose and San Diego. IFT workshop participants clearly felt the passion driving these grant projects, although the projects themselves could not have been more different.

Beverly Bricker of the Palm Springs TA spoke of the profound impact that her Project to Inspire grant had on Spanish-speaking families of pre-school students in the District. Administrators and School Board members saw the value in these parent connections and now Palm Springs USD supports the program as part of its LCAP.

Fortuna High School English teacher Amy Conley connected with her colleagues to provide 180 graduating seniors with a powerful positive vision of their future as part of her Change the World project. The community-based project led to a realignment of the school’s 9-12 English curriculum.

Mariana Robles, a Riverside elementary teacher, used her back-to-back educator Artech grants to bring art back into the classroom, link it to the school’s technology and empower her Hawthorne Elementary colleagues to embark on a cultural shift to embrace teacher leadership at the school.

The presenters made it clear to those in attendance that our CTA members know how to build on students’ strengths to enhance student achievement. They stressed that those plans can come to life when they are given resources and support.

Over the past seven weeks, more than a dozen successful IFT Grant recipients have inspired fellow CTA members at the IFT Teacher Innovation Expo and both Good Teaching Conferences.

Pictured above are Anna Mumford (left) and Beverly Bricker, who spoke in San Jose. Anna’s 4-line, haiku-like statement clearly encapsulates the essence of the IFT Grant Process. Both teachers were surprised at the community’s positive response to their grant projects.

Pictured at left in San Diego are Mariana Robles (left) and Amy Conley. Mariana outlined the many emotions that she and her colleagues felt as they witnessed the transformations that occurred at their school with the Artech grant. Even today, two years after the implementation, the school staff continues to make connections to support their student-centered approach.
Two years ago, Kory Bootsma, a science and agriculture teacher at Rancho Verde High School in Riverside County had a dream. She wanted to bring the study of Aquaponics and Hydroponics to life for her students. But, she was woefully short of resources and supplies.

She applied for and received IFT grants in both 2013-14 and 2014-15. Her back-to-back grants have helped to establish a hydroponic system and the continued growth of an aquaponics system for the Plant and Soil Science class in the CTE AgriScience Pathway.

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It also allowed the grant recipient to move from a storage closet (above) to a full-blown greenhouse (below), built on previously unused land on her campus. Kory is pictured in the greenhouse in March with Barry Wissman, a Palm Springs teacher who serves on the IFT Grant Selection Committee.

A link to the on-line grant application and much helpful supporting information is available under the Grant tab on the IFT website: (www.teacherdrivenchange.org). For the 2015-16 school year, the grant application period opened on January 1, 2015. Applications are due no later than April 30, 2015.

The Grant Selection Committee will meet in May 2015. They will use the seven factors of the IFT Strength-based Matrix as the lens to evaluate the proposals. Grant recommendations will come to the IFT Board of Directors in June 2015 for formal approval.

Grant checks will be mailed in late July/early August for use in the upcoming school year. As part of the application process, local Association Presidents will be asked to sign off indicating their willingness to have the local Association serve as a fiscal agent on behalf of the grant recipient. This increases accountability and insures that the individual member incurs no tax liability.

During the school year, members of the Grant Selection Committee and the regional Teacher Think Tanks will join IFT staff to visit each project location and to meet with team members to discover their learnings.

Thinking of Applying for an IFT Grant? The deadline is April 30, 2015.

Since 2009, the CTA Institute for Teaching has been utilizing CTA members’ voluntary dues contributions (from the $20 reverse dues check off created in 2008) to fund strength-based teacher driven projects at schools all over California.

To date, IFT has funded 128 grant projects totaling more than $1.2 million. All CTA members are eligible to apply for an Educator grant (up to $5,000) or an Impact grant (up to $20,000).

This is a competitive grant program and grants are evaluated by the IFT Grant Selection Committee, made up of five educators and an IFT support staff person. These educators represent various grade levels and are experienced in the strength-based approach.

In the first five years of the program, IFT received a total of 322 grant applications. The 128 funded grants represent an acceptance rate of 39%.

Grant Visits Continue from March-May, 2015- From Chula Vista to Chico (and points in between)
IFT Board of Directors Meeting- April 23, 2015- Burlingame
IFT 2015-16 Grant Selection Committee Meeting- May 15-16, 2015- Oakland

BEFORE

AFTER