IFT Receives 93 Grant Applications from CTA Members to Support Strength-Based Teacher Driven Change in 2015-16

The IFT Grant program is alive and well. The ninety-three grant applications received by the April 30th deadline represent a diverse cross-section of CTA members, from Transitional Kindergarten teachers through Community College and Cal State University instructors. The proposals range from STEM to History, from Agriculture to Weather, from Math to Fine Arts, from School Gardens to Computers, from Parent Engagement to Physical Fitness, as well as dozens of other strength-based projects.

The process of sorting through the proposals fell to the IFT Grant Selection Committee, which met on May 15-16 in Oakland. The Committee includes teachers Barry Wissman (Palm Springs), Carlos Solis (Ontario-Montclair), Kelly Iwamoto (Inglewood), teacher/librarian Sarah Morgan, (Merced) and Anita Benitas (IFT Staff). Veteran grant scorer and long-time member of the IFT Board Liane Cismowski joined the deliberations on-line. The committee used the IFT Strength-Based Matrix as the lens to evaluate each grant proposal.

Grant recommendations will be presented to the IFT Board of Directors for approval in June. Grant funds will be sent to local Associations during the summer to enable the 2015-16 grant recipients to get an early start on implementing their grant projects.

Thanks to the generosity of CTA members, nearly half-a-million dollars is targeted to support the work of other CTA members in their classrooms and in their schools during the upcoming school year.

Labor Management Collaboration Highlighted by CA Dept. of Education

Teachers from fifty different California districts demonstrated their leadership as part of Symposium organized by the CA Dept. of Education and hosted by State Supt. of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson to highlight great examples of labor-management collaboration.

Organizations representing teachers (CTA & CFT), classified staff (CSEA), school board members (CSBA) and administrators (ACSA), opened the Symposium with a panel discussion. The CTA Vice-President, Eric Heins, told participants that adequate school funding plays a vital role in allowing for collaboration. He said, “Collaboration does not mean loss of power; it means parity.” But, he admitted that it sometimes comes with political risks.

School Board member Pam Costa and Teachers Association President Shannan Brown of the San Juan USD spoke about the parity that exists in the District’s Peer Assistance and Review program. They passionately believe that quality teaching is a shared responsibility. Their PAR program is designed to assist both beginning and veteran teachers.

Teacher leaders (from left) Barry Roth, Molly Elliott and Edward Burgess of Encina Preparatory High School in the San Juan USD speak about the successes and challenges of their teacher driven transformation project.

Beginning in 2011, and with the strong support of both SJTA and SJUSD, the staff embarked on a collaborative effort to re-design the school’s governance. By 2014, their efforts had yielded multiple, effective leadership teams, as well as a new mental model, “We are owners, not renters.”
Grants Strengthen Students’ Connections to the Future, as well as to the Past

Jonathan Pu’u attended Chip Fraser’s *It’s My Life* Summit to demonstrate his support of what he calls a program and a philosophy. Jonathan credits Fraser’s work at the continuation high school for putting him on the road to excellence in Muay Thai, a sophisticated martial art that has become a calling for him.

*It’s My Life* has similarly touched the lives of more than 800 students since it began in 2007 at Pacific High School in Ventura. Its creator is Chip Fraser, who also serves as the President of the Ventura Unified Education Association. Teaching is a second career for Fraser and he brings a passion and commitment to providing tools so that his students can resolve the complexities of life.

A three-time IFT Grant recipient, Fraser works closely with the entire staff at Pacific HS and he credits a strong partnership with colleague Brian Jamarillo in helping to refine the character education approach that has been endorsed by the Ventura School District.

Similar strength-based work was being done miles away near Sonora, a former logging and mining community near Yosemite National Park.

IFT Grant recipient Liz Miller, a veteran elementary teacher with a passion for connecting the past with the present, also serves as President of the 24-member Curtis Creek Faculty Association.

She enlisted her teaching colleagues into joining forces in support of a 2014-15 Impact Grant called *Building Community with Community*. The student and staff projects developed by the teachers helped strengthen community relationships, build autonomy, and build on the strengths and expertise of all of the educational stakeholders involved.

Chip Fraser (left), a teacher at Pacific High School, discussed the impacts of his *It’s My Life* program with former students, teaching colleagues, and guests at the first-ever *It’s My Life* Summit on The Day of the Teacher, May 13, 2015.

Pacific High Class of 2007 graduate, Jonathan Pu’u, told IFT Manager Dick Gale (right) that the goal setting skills he learned as part of the It’s My Life program helped him go to places he never pictured.

(Below left) IFT Program Consultant Anita Benitas talks with Liz Miller at the one-hundred-year-old site of her district’s second school. As part of the grant project, Curtis Creek elementary teachers organized an archaeological dig there to coincide with the community’s sesquicentennial celebration.

The grant also allowed the staff to work intensively together, and with the assistance of a respected local artist, to select subjects and design panels for the school’s historical mural. Even though there was much discussion, and even debate, about the final choices, taken together, the colorful mural is a provocative reminder for students and staff about where we’ve been and where we’re going.

(Below right) On May 14th, teachers gathered on the campus in preparation for the mural unveiling. The six-panel installation is divided into 25-year segments beginning in 1865. The student-designed illustrations depict the history of Curtis Creek Elementary, as well as significant state and national events and individuals. (Where else could you find John Muir, Albert Einstein, the Cowardly Lion and Michael Jackson all together?)