Students’ Strengths Reflected in the Faces of Fortuna High School

English Teacher’s “Change the World” Project has impacted her Students and their Community

CTA member Amy Conley (middle right, with graduating senior Dalia Cortes), a twelfth-grade English teacher at Fortuna High School in Humboldt County, believes the Common Core Standards challenge teachers to do something exciting and to coach students to write something real. Amy sees this “as an invitation to do something lovely; as an invitation to change the world.”

Her culminating Change the World Project, funded in part by a 2014-15 IFT Grant, allows every senior to develop his or her personal strengths and passions through unique service projects, connecting with and benefiting their local community and world as a whole, one project at a time.

Amy writes that culminating project-based learning (PBL) encourages seniors to take what they know about the world and their passions, and connect it to their strengths, skills, and futures to challenge themselves to grow. The parameters of the project are simple:

1. Students must connect their passions and strengths to the world.
2. Students must challenge themselves.
3. Students must in some way make the world better.

Amy believes that’s a lot of leash. She said that she received ideas as disparate as pro-nutrition posters for elementary school cafeterias featuring high school athletes in uniform, working with the Bureau of Land Management to remove non-native species from our local beaches, hosting middle school fun nights, installing new school benches, historic preservation, and after-school tutoring.

With the Common Core’s emphasis on authentic writing and thinking tasks for real audiences and purposes, as well as its emphasis on college and career readiness, Amy believes the Change the World project and curriculum enables seniors to plan, write, work with others, interview community members, and accomplish real tasks.

Spirits were running high on May 19th at the Eel River Valley Multigenerational Center in Fortuna. For over four hours, hundreds of students, parents and community members mingled with soon-to-be-graduating seniors to discuss their Change the World projects. Many of these proud students paused in their presentations to pose for an IFT photo. While the focus of their projects varied widely, they all reflected the interests and passions of their creators. The projects included: fresh water stations on campus to eliminate the need for plastic water bottles, a middle school public speaking program, a poetry slam, construction of a shed to house tools and supplies for the school garden, an LGBT pot-luck dinner, a middle school soccer program and a campaign to raise awareness among FHS students of their constitutional rights.
One day. 20,000 teachers. 33 locations. A lifetime of learning.

Across the state, California teachers are driving innovation in the classroom and shaping our students’ futures. To support their critical work, a coalition of California colleges and universities is inviting teachers to come together on July 31 to build powerful networks, share successful classroom practices and access effective resources to implement the California Standards, including the Common Core.

Register today at no cost for Better Together: California Teachers Summit. Be part of this exciting opportunity to hear from nationally renowned speakers and participate in dynamic sessions led by teachers, for teachers.

WHO: All PreK-12 California teachers and teacher candidates are invited to participate in this unprecedented event, which is expected to draw 20,000 teachers from across the state.

WHAT: New Teacher Center, the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) and California State University (CSU) and are hosting this one-of-a-kind summit featuring:

- Sessions by teachers sharing practical and cutting-edge strategies that are working in classrooms across the state.
- Concrete tools and resources to help teachers implement the California Standards, including the Common Core.
- Opportunities to collaborate and connect with fellow teachers and build a powerful, lasting network of peers.
- Nationally renowned keynote speakers.
- A .5 unit continuing education credit will be available to teachers at a minimal cost.

WHEN: Friday, July 31, 2015 from 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

WHERE: 33 locations across the state

WHY: By coming together to share ideas and build networks, teachers will have the power to help each other succeed and to make an even bigger difference in their students’ lives.

Register online at www.cateacherssummit.com and follow #CATeachersSummit for up-to-date information.