When they met together in Burlingame on September 24th & 25th, the seventeen members of IFT’s two northern California Teacher Think Tanks developed distinct and ambitious objectives for their work together.

First, they decided that they want to be leaders in assisting IFT and CTA to “transform public education for the better by celebrating the possible and amplifying teacher voice and leadership within vibrant coalitions that improve schools and learning.”

Their second objective was “to promote robust and diverse ways of teaching and learning, as well as to build on the strengths already present in our public schools.”

Finally, they determined “to reach teachers where they are—in the classroom. We want to help local teacher unions take ownership of quality teaching and community building and organizing. We want to be advocates for equity of resources and opportunity across our state.”

This critical work is precisely aligned with our union’s current outreach to exceptional practitioners. Collectively, these members hope to do nothing less than transform our profession.

An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was utilized during the retreat. It was designed and presented by two outstanding retired CTA staffers who also serve as Teacher Think Tank Facilitators, Yale Wishnick and Sheila Bell.

The approach allows the group to individually and collectively search for the best of what is in ourselves, our Think Tanks, our Association and the teaching and learning environment.

Appreciative Inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential. It emphasizes opportunities and possibilities through self-governing and self-organizing activities.

The goal of the retreat was to create powerful provocative propositions that bridge the best of “what is” with an intuition of “what might be.”
School Community Reflects on Ramona’s Garden Transformation

When CTA member Donna Braye-Romero applied for an IFT grant to build a school garden in 2014, she did not realize what course the project would take. This past September, with the benefit of hindsight, Donna and her colleagues were able to reflect with pride on the outpouring of community and school support that enabled their small garden team to literally transform the campus.

Because Ramona Community School serves a diverse student population (K-6 Montessori students and 9-12 Independent Study students), the design team wanted a versatile space that could benefit all.

Armed with a $5,000 grant, courtesy of CTA members’ voluntary dues contributions, the Ramona group designed and implemented an ambitious garden project that continues to grow and change even as we move into the new school year.

Currently, the garden features flowering plants as well as fruits and vegetables. Still to be added are three teaching stations and a hydroponic system.

One of the most unique features of the garden is the meandering path to the reflection rock. Students can walk the path, sit on the rock and reflect on their behavior or their hopes and dreams.

In the top picture, school staff, district leaders, parents and key community members joined together for the September 15th dedication of Ramona Community School's Reflection Garden. In the series of pictures (at right), the school’s garden design team poses (top) on the designated section of the campus before the project broke ground. The after picture (middle) shows the garden today with its diverse collection of planters and vegetation. The reflection rock (bottom) anchors the garden in the school’s program to assist the mental and emotional development of the young people they serve.