School Visits Affirm Value of 2015-16 Strength-Based Grants

One of the most rewarding parts of the IFT Grant Program is traveling around the state and checking in with our grant recipients in their classrooms, at their schools and in their communities. IFT believes that it is in this environment, their “natural habitat,” where IFT staff, local Association leaders, regional teacher think tank members and supportive colleagues can join together to learn from the 2015-16 grant recipients and their students.

For this school year, the IFT Grant Selection Committee selected 38 grant projects statewide, awarding a record total of $491,910. That broad base of grant projects translates to more than three months of crisscrossing California and discovering the innovative, strength-based ideas that CTA members are implementing to enhance learning opportunities for their students.

This year’s grant visit cycle began in January in the Twin Rivers USD at Joyce Elementary in North Highlands. Anita Benitas, IFT staffer, met grant recipient Julieanne Neal and her students for a celebration of her GLAD for the Arts grant. They were joined by Kristen Finney, President of Twin Rivers United Educators (TRUE) and Rob Myers (Principal of F.C. Joyce Elementary). Fortunately, Anita loves to travel. Her grant journeys will continue until early May. She will talk with CTA members from Brawley to Huntington Beach, from Fontana to Fresno, from Sierra Madre to San Diego.

Julianne and her colleagues believe that student learning will be enhanced with the school-wide implementation of Guided Language Acquisition and Design (GLAD) strategies and visual and performing arts integration. They designed a project that would incorporate this approach with VAPA integration to engage and motivate students. The educators at Joyce believed that GLAD strategies, with their embedded practices for building teamwork and deeper understanding of concepts, greater sense of classroom community and equity, along with and arts integration, would increase access to learning and make school more meaningful and enjoyable for all students. They felt this would lead to deeper learning and mastery of grade level standards.

More than 150 students and parents from the F.C. Joyce school community gathered together (above and below right) on January 28, 2016 for a Learning Demonstration Night, one of several that will be held this year. (Below left) Kristen Finney, TRUE President also attended the after-school learning event to show her support for the strength-based work being accomplished by grant recipient, Julieanne Neal and her colleagues. In recent years, TRUE also supported the Algebra Success Academy, a Twin Rivers-based mathematics project.
IFT Grant Recipients + Think Tank Members + Emphasis on Strength-Based Teaching and Learning = The IFT Teacher Innovation Expo!

When hundreds of CTA members gather in Orange County (Garden Grove) the weekend of February 26th-28th for the CTA Good Teaching Conference-South, they will have several opportunities to sample strength-based teacher change.

First, all systems are go for Friday’s IFT Teacher Innovation Expo all-day preconference. Nearly one hundred educators are registered for this teacher-planned and teacher-led Expo that will feature presentations from nine successful IFT grant recipients. Among the attendees will be more than two dozen IFT Teacher Think Tank members and their invited guests.

Then on Saturday, the first day of the Good Teaching Conference, participants can again learn more about the Institute for teaching’s strength-based approach. There is a teacher driven session by members of IFT’s San Diego Teacher Think Tank called “Just Do It-A Practical Guide to Empower Educational Practitioners.”

Newest IFT Board Member Brings Passion for the Classroom

IFT welcomes Caesar Chavez High School English teacher Justin McGehee as the newest member of the IFT Board of Directors. Justin, who is a member of the Natoms Teacher Think Tank, becomes the fifth full-time teacher to join IFT’s Board in the past two and a half years. Predictably for a Language Arts teacher, Justin’s way with words has enabled him to succeed not only in his classroom, but also as a member of the Natoms Teacher Think Tank, CTA’s Assessment Literacy Task Force and the Stockton Teachers Association’s Bargaining Team.

Justin’s involvement in the Union was sparked by his appointment as a VIVA Teacher, a group of educators assembled by the National Education Association to assess teachers; attitudes toward accountability. Out of one thousand people who were involved in the project, Justin was one of 16 who was invited to Washington D.C. to present the report to NEA.

According to Justin, not only did this year-long experience “permanently change my view of the profession,” but it enabled him to become acquainted with CTA President Eric Heins. After meeting Justin in Washington D.C., it was Heins who recommended that he participate in the IFT Teacher Think Tank program.

In his non-teaching time, Justin helps design local assessments for his district, trains his colleagues in formative assessment, works with the District’s Professional Development Center and serves as a Common Core curriculum designer. Although he has no formal leadership position at his school, he is regarded as a leader by his teaching colleagues. Justin is married to Rachel and is the father of two sons, Geist, 9 and Zac, 7.

Justin McGehee is one of 28 teachers who have worked at Stockton’s Chavez High School since it opened in 2005.

He teaches 10th & 11th-grade English, as well as Level 1 ELD. He also serves as the lab proctor for the school’s on-line credit recovery program.

Members of the San Diego Teacher Think Tank will be bringing fresh insights into IFT’s strength-based matrix. Pictured above on the bottom row from left are: Dominic Dirksen (Steele Canyon HS TA), Jennifer Moon (Escondido Elementary EA) and Jennifer Skellett (President of the Oceanside TA). The top row includes (from left), TT Facilitator & Retired CTA staffer Dr. Yale Wishnick, Molly O’Hara & Holly Kaye (Escondido Elementary EA members) and Serina West (Oceanside TA).