IFT Board to Consider 47 Grant Recommendations for 2016-17

Grant Selection Committee Proposes Over $600,000 in Dues Support for Strength-Based Projects

The CTA Institute for Teaching’s Grant Program supports the creativity, vision and passion of our members. As we begin the seventh year of grant funding, IFT salutes all of our previous 125 grant recipients.

We also commend the dozens of CTA members who took the opportunity to submit an application for this competitive program. Their requests totaled over $1.3 million. Despite an increased grant budget of $600,000 for 2016-17, not all applicants were selected.

The six members of the IFT Grant Selection Committee met in Sacramento on May 20-21, 2016 to evaluate nearly 100 grant applications. According to the teachers on the committee, this year’s grant applications were the best yet in terms of their fidelity to the strength-based matrix, which is the lens the committee uses to score the applications.

Projects are evaluated without identifying information. Each of the proposals receives a score of 0-3-points for each of the seven strength-based factors in the matrix.

Strength-Based Reflections from the Extraordinary Liane Cismowski

“It’s really very simple: teaching is my love.” So begins a revealing IFT interview with Liane Cismowski, a practitioner of strength-based approaches to educational leadership. Excerpts from the interview continue on page 2. Liane has been an IFT Board of Directors and Grant Selection Committee member since 2009. She continues her educational journey as the principal of Mt. Diablo High School.

“While I am currently a high school principal, my happiest and most gratifying times continue to be when I am teaching and interacting with students. I make it a priority to engage students as often as I can...To me, it’s the human condition; kids, like adults have basic needs - most importantly, kids want and need to be accepted.”

“Teachers, too, have some basic professional needs but most revolve around respect and support...Being able to interact with all subject area teachers, allows me to see how much all teachers do to go above and beyond. I also get to witness the magic of teaching and learning every day.”

Liane Cismowski made substantive contributions as a teacher for over 25 years in many different grade levels and educational settings: K-6 music teacher, middle school English and Social Studies, second grade, fourth grade, high school English, Continuation High School English, English Language Development. She has been on the faculty of the Masters of Arts in Teaching Leadership program at St. Mary’s College of California. She is a National Board Certified Teacher in English Language Arts. She was the Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year in 2003, was the National Education Association California Teacher of the Year in 2004, and won the CTA Gold Award in 2004.
In the weeks before California’s Nov. 8 special election that shot down Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s three education proposals, a soft-spoken teacher who appeared in a television advertisement is being credited with helping the state’s main teachers’ union best the famous Republican governor.

Liane Cismowski, a 48-year-old English teacher at Olympia High School in Concord, Calif., was picked “on a fluke” by political strategists for the California Teachers Association who wanted to put a sympathetic face on the teachers’ battle plan to defeat the proposals.

“I don’t think most of us realized what an impact she would have right away” said CTA President Barbara Kerr. “She was the face of teachers for this campaign.”

She was eager to appear in the commercials because she wanted to let the public know that schools are struggling. Ms. Cismowski said she was often recognized in public during the campaign.

But she doesn’t see an acting career in her future. “I’m happy to be back in my classroom, doing my real job, which is teaching,” she said.