IFT Welcomes Three Outstanding Educators to the Board of Directors

As the 2016-17 school year begins, the Institute for Teaching gratefully and proudly acknowledges the ninth consecutive year of funding from the voluntary dues contributions of CTA members. These dollars, as well as a strong vision of teacher leadership, have led directly to vibrant, on-going programs like the regional Teacher Think Tanks and the IFT Grant program.

Attempting to connect our union’s work with the work our members are doing in their schools and classrooms has been an on-going priority for the IFT Board of Directors. Although our leadership has continued to evolve, one thing that has not changed is IFT’s commitment to promote strength-based teacher driven change.

Please welcome IFT’s three newest Board members. They join a governing group that meets every other month during the school year in Burlingame. The Board is additionally comprised of the three CTA officers, another CTA Board liaison, four other outstanding classroom practitioners from around the state and a strength-based administrator who was a highly-regarded teacher for many years.

IFT is proud to welcome Erika Jones, an 11-year veteran elementary teacher from Los Angeles USD. Erika is a strong civil rights advocate and has served in a number of leadership positions in her local, UTLA. She also chaired the Civil Rights in Education Committee of State Council and served on CTA’s Long-Term Strategic Planning Workgroup. Erika holds a bachelor’s in international business from Mount St. Mary’s University in Los Angeles, and earned her teaching credential and a master’s degree in curriculum instruction from California State University, Northridge. Erika, who also holds a master’s degree in education policy from National University, said that she “truly believes that teachers can and will change the world for the better.”

Dr. Kevin Kumashiro is Dean and Professor of the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. He is a leading expert on educational policy, school reform, teacher preparation, and educational equity and social justice, with a wide-ranging list of accomplishments nationally and internationally as a scholar, educator, leader, and advocate. He has taught in schools and colleges across the United States and abroad and has served as a consultant for school districts, organizations, and state and federal agencies. Kevin is an award-winning author and editor of ten books, including: Troubling Education; Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning toward Social Justice; and Bad Teacher!: How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture.

Gabriela Orozco-Gonzalez has been a K-6 teacher since 2000. She is currently a 2nd-grade teacher in the Montebello USD and a union activist with the Montebello TA. Gabriela has been a pioneer in the teacher leadership movement in CTA/NEA, having served as a member of IPD’s Teacher Leadership Cohort and Instructional Leadership Corps and as a facilitator in NEA’s ED Communities. In addition, she designed the successful Common Core Café, which has developed a core set of master teachers working together to develop expertise of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and utilize technological resources to enhance instruction. She describes herself as “a wife, mother, blogger and LA Dodgers super fan.”
Since 2012, the CTA Institute for Teaching has organized conversations with a diverse set of teachers as part of the IFT Regional Think Tanks program. These CTA members have made tangible contributions, such as the Teacher Innovation Expo, the Strength-Based HUB and the Ovation! Toolkit.

There are currently nine active Think Tanks spread across CTA’s four regions. Although meeting locations may vary, they generally include (north to south): San Rafael, San Jose, Natomas, Stockton, Fresno, Oxnard, Monrovia, Moreno Valley, Brea, Laguna Hills and San Diego. The Think Tanks are comprised of approximately six dozen California educators.

IFT needs your support to continue to ensure that the voices of our exemplary practitioners are heard. As an engaged teacher leader, you have the opportunity to meet fellow members who are not only passionate about their work, but also eager to voice their ideas on the teaching profession, public education and the teaching and learning process.

The CTA IFT would like to recruit some of these teachers to be part of our teacher think tanks and to build on what’s great about schools to make them even better.

_Ideally, think tank participants are CTA members who are exceptional practitioners who see the BIG PICTURE and may not otherwise be actively involved in the work of our union._

We know that CTA is blessed with some of the brightest, most innovative people. They work daily in classrooms and in schools all over the state. Women and men from all backgrounds, create, invent and discover their way into the minds of children and young adults every day.

Often, without any celebrity, our members are developing new structures, procedures and practices to improve the teaching and learning environment. Seldom are these teachers asked for their opinions about their chosen profession or the major issues that confront educators in the United States and in California.

IFT is attempting to harness their energy and bring a strength-based perspective to the conversation. With your help, we can ensure that the right people are in the room. Please contact IFT Manager Dick Gale (Dgale@cta.org) at the IFT office (619-683-3990) in San Diego if you have a recommendation for Teacher Think Tank membership.

Fontana teacher Trent Stillman’s new license plate and frame display his obvious pride in being a member of the Moreno Valley Think Tank. His group has invested much time and energy in the development of IFT’s social media platform, the Strength-Based HUB.

In July, Leslie Anido (left) of the South Bay Think Tank and Allison Carrey (right) of the Orange County Think Tank spoke about the work of their groups to interested local association leaders at the CTA Presidents Conference at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose.