A group of Orange County educators spent a recent Saturday afternoon in the library of Fullerton’s La Vista High School to demonstrate how California teachers are willing and able to lead. Their efforts are a positive example of both vision and action. They validate U.S. Secretary of Education John King’s surprising statement endorsing authentic teacher leadership, “We don’t just want educators to be part of the necessary change – we need them to lead it.”

California was the fifteenth stop for the folks from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards on their ongoing tour of states to observe and encourage local educators.

Not that these Southern California ILC members needed much encouragement, given their strong commitment to creating support for all teachers. Their vision is a pathway that offers meaningful support at every step- from high school students considering teaching as a profession to career teachers looking to enhance their skills through National Board Certification.

Two IPD staff members from CTA’s Instruction and Professional Development Department, Marlene Fong and Karen Taylor, strongly supported this effort along with the IFT.

Many of the teachers participating in the DOE’S Cultivating Teacher Leaders Lab are members of CTA’S Instructional Leadership Corps, now in its third year of providing teacher support.

Among the Think Tank members attending the Teach to Lead Lab are (from left), Leslee Milch (Buena Park TA), Rebecca Sackett (Santa Ana EA), Karen Sher (Oxnard EA), Dick Gale (IFT Manager), Karin Barone (Orange UEA), Charles Ritz (North OC Think Tank Facilitator), Al Rabanera (Fullerton Secondary TO), Denise Bradford (Saddleback Valley EA) and Francisco Escobedo (San Bernardino TA).

Dr. Rabanera was the primary organizer of this first California-based Teacher to Lead event. He was recently selected for a $250,000 Great Public Schools grant from NEA to support his project: “Cultivating Teacher Leaders: A Progressive Approach.”
CTA Member Support and Engagement: IFT Style

After listening to an Institute for Teaching presentation in Reno recently, a group of emerging leaders from Region 2 were asked for a one-word reaction. “Inspired.” “Positive.” “Challenging.” “Committed.” “Hopeful.” We’ll take it. It is the IFT’s hope that the members’ positive reaction will translate to positive action to participate in the world of strength-based teacher driven change.

Every year, IFT staff meet and talk with hundreds of CTA members as they tour California and Nevada to participate in our union-sponsored regional and statewide leadership conferences.

All CTA members, from pre-school to college, are eligible to become grant recipients, teacher think tank members or participants in a strength-based school transformation project.

The work of IFT falls under CTA’s Foundation for Teaching and Learning and is supported by a portion of our members’ $20 annual voluntary dues contributions.

These funds enable the IFT to work closely with teachers and support staff to bring student-centered, strength-based approaches to their work.

The IFT’s work is based on the belief that member-driven creativity, passion and innovation are the keys to transforming our profession. Every day our grant recipients and regional teacher think tank members are demonstrating the effectiveness of the strength-based approach.

We consider it to be our union’s responsibility to invest in our profession. We are proud that the IFT has been able to award over $2.3 million in grants to CTA members in the seven years since the grant program began. We know that these grants provide resources to fund the passions that our members feel for their work and their students. We are fortunate to be able to honor our members for their commitment to California’s students.

Dr. Anita Benitas (top), of IFT’s Natomas office, works at the Institute for Teaching table at the Region 1 Leadership Conference in San Jose in September. Conference participants often stop by to learn more about IFT’s programs or to discuss a grant they have received in support of their classroom or school community.

Vicki Ono an elementary teacher from Redding (middle left) discusses her 2016-17 grant with IFT Manager Dick Gale. Vicki’s strength-based project is called “NGSS Scientists Start in Kindergarten.” Her goal is to help realign resources in kindergarten classes with the new NGSS standards, as well as encourage her students to engage and explore their own environment.

Barry Wissman, (right) a respected Palm Springs elementary teacher, has served on the IFT Grant Selection Committee since its inception in 2009. He is pictured with Val Verde teacher Kory Bootsma during a grant visit, where they discussed the amazing progress that was made at her high school with funds from two science grants in 2013 & 2014. IFT staff and interested teachers visit each grant recipient at their school site during the year to find out what is working.

The CTA Institute for Teaching (IFT) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. IFT supports strength-based teacher driven change in school communities across California. Please contact IFT at 619-683-3990 or at contact@teacherdrivenchange.org