IFT Regional Teacher Think Tank Members Gather to Reaffirm Their Commitment to Strength-Based Teacher Driven Change

Nearly four dozen educators from around the state gathered for a two-day statewide conference in January to discuss the future of IFT’s strength-based Teacher Think Tanks.

Their expressions of hope and optimism about the state of education in California stood in direct contrast to the prevailing skepticism, fear and uncertainty that often comes with dramatic changes in the status quo.

Debbie Schroder, an Orange County Think Tank member reacted to the two-day event in a way that spoke for many when she said, “As I head back to school tomorrow, I feel recharged and ready to go. I have come up with a mantra in my head. ‘People filled with light, unite.’ When we surround ourselves with strength-based thinkers, we become lighter and brighter. This permits us to focus on what’s really important -- our scholars and everything that is working when it comes to public education.”

That view was echoed by several of the TT participants who have additional leadership roles in their local associations. Denise Bradford, President of the Saddleback Valley EA spoke for many, “Thank you to Think Tank creators who spoke today. You are so right on that as teachers we have tons of energy to create, while our fighting energy is limited. As a local leader promoting Teacher Driven Change, I am able to build on our strengths and it energizes my members.”

Stockton teacher Justin McGehee, who also serves on the IFT Board of Directors, stated, “Any focus on creation allows us to primarily fight ‘for’ something rather than fighting ‘against’ something.” For these educators, that something is nothing less than the creation here in California of the first strength-based state educational system in the U.S.

Scenes from the statewide Teacher Think Tank Conference: (clockwise from top left) Palo Alto English teacher and author David Cohen partnered with Fullerton teacher Al Rabanera for an Appreciative Inquiry interview as part of a group activity focusing on what’s working in school. Eric Heins, CTA President, (top right) spoke to the group about the importance of the Teacher Think Tanks in achieving CTA’s long-term goal of Transforming the Profession. Alisal teacher Angela Der Ramos (middle right) reacted positively to the ideas of her Think Tank colleagues in response to the question of where the Think Tanks are headed in the future. Dr. Paul Porter (bottom right) described the Gallup strength-based work being done with staff and students at Harrison Middle School in Sonoma. Fullerton English teacher Tricia Hyun (bottom left) spoke to the group about the IFT Strength Based HUB and its power to connect the work of the regional Think Tank groups. Denise Bradford and Judy Blakeney (middle left), both members of the Laguna Hills Think Tank, were enthusiastic about several of the conference goals, which included (1) telling our strength-based stories, (2) infusing IFT’s seven factors into district and teacher staff development, and (3) taking back our teaching profession in a positive way.
The IFT Grant Program is Changing Education One School at a Time

It’s grant application time! All CTA members are eligible to apply for an **Educator grant (up to $5,000)** or an **Impact grant (up to $20,000)**. The application deadline for 2017-18 grants is April 30th.

Since 2010, the CTA Institute for Teaching has been utilizing a portion of CTA members’ $20 voluntary dues contributions to fund strength-based teacher driven projects at schools all over California.

According to Doug Reeves, an expert on student achievement and educational equity, “A radical transformation toward teacher leadership is not an option; it is a necessity.” IFT is working to assist our union in having a real voice in school transformation by supporting our members as the shape the future of teaching and public education in California.

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**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 knows 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.

**In the IFT, we consider it to be our union’s responsibility to invest in our profession. We are proud that the IFT grant program has awarded over $2.3 million in grants to CTA members in the seven years since the program began.**

This is a competitive grant program and grants are evaluated by the IFT Grant Selection Committee, made up of five educators from around the state and an IFT staff consultant. These educators represent various grade levels and are experienced in the strength-based approach. In the first seven years of the program, IFT received over 500 grant applications. The 214 funded grants represent an acceptance rate of more than 40%.

A link to the grant application and tons of supporting information is available under the Grant tab on the IFT website (www.teacherdrivenchange.org). The 2017-18 grant application period is now open and all applications are due no later than April 30th. The Grant Selection Committee meets in May. They use the seven-factor IFT Strength-based Matrix as the lens to evaluate the grant proposals.

Grant recommendations will come to the IFT Board of Directors in June for formal approval. Grant checks are mailed in late July/early August for use in the upcoming school year. As part of the application process, local Association Presidents are asked to sign off, indicating their willingness to have the local Association serve as a fiscal agent on behalf of the grant recipient. This increases accountability and insures that the individual member incurs no tax liability.

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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 ift@teacherdrivenchange.org