Teacher Think Tanks Promote Strength-Based Education
CTA Members Advocate for Change at a Variety of Conferences and Workshops

IFT’s Teacher Think Tanks are alive and well in Southern California thanks to the efforts of passionate and dedicated educators who believe in the power of strength-based teacher driven change.

A newly-formed Think Tank in Southwest Riverside County met initially last November at the Temecula Valley EA office with high school geometry teacher Kristan Morales serving as the TT facilitator.

A portion of this group participated later in the CA Labor-Management Initiative meeting in Norco with other local teachers and district administrators.

Dedicated teachers from Southwest Riverside County gathered to learn more about IFT’s strength-based approach and how it might inspire their work as a newly-formed Think Tank. The group expressed an interest in supporting student-led Passion Projects. In the picture above, the Think Tank members posed with CTA staffer Brian Eldridge, as well as TVEA President Jeff Kingsberg (far left).

Members of the North Orange County Think Tank, Al Rabanera, Robert Bassett, Michelle Ramos, Karin Barone and Jenny Hitchcock (right) took time out from their organizing efforts for the Teachers Teaching Teachers professional development event at Cal State Fullerton on March 16th to pose with IFT Manager Dick Gale. This event, which is now in its third year, is an outgrowth of the work of CTA’s Instructional Leadership Corps.

In the picture below, Dr. Carl Cohn (far right), former Executive Director of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and a member of the IFT Board of Directors, participated in last month’s IFT 2019 Teacher Innovation Expo. He was joined by several outstanding teachers, including Alejandro Cisneros, Jess Sanchez and Mikki Cichocki of the Moreno Valley Think Tank. The Think Tank group attended in preparation for two presentations they were making at the CTA Good Teaching Conference-South.

At the same time, teachers from North Orange County and the inland Empire continued to work on their own strength-based projects.

The focus of the NOCTT group, under the leadership of Fullerton teacher Al Rabanera, is to engage with early career educators, to connect them with strength-based concepts and to introduce them to the work of our union.

The Moreno Valley Think Tank, led by facilitator Mikki Cichocki, continues its work on restorative practices for effective classroom management. As an outgrowth of their own two-day Strength-Based Justice forum in April, 2018, several of these teachers presented workshops at CTA’s Good Teaching Conference-South in Garden Grove in March.
2019-2020 Grant Selection Process Begins with 125 Member Applications

As the March 31, 2019 deadline for IFT Grant applications passed, one hundred twenty-five CTA members took a chance on funding their educational dreams. They joined the applicant pool for next year’s IFT Grant Program.

Over the past ten years, the Institute for Teaching has used voluntary dues contributions from CTA members to fund over 300 strength-based grant projects totaling over $3.5 million.

This year, applications were received from 88 different local Associations, including several (Anaheim Secondary, Chico, San Diego, Shasta Secondary and West Sacramento) with four or more.

The geographic breakdown follows a historical pattern, with 25 from CTA Region 1, 36 from CTA Region 2, 19 from CTA Region 3 and 45 from CTA Region 4.

The Grant Selection Committee’s recommendations will be brought to the IFT Board of Directors for their consideration on June 20, 2019. Once approved, all grant applicants will be notified of their status by mid-July.

Those selected for funding will work with their local Association as a fiscal agent on their behalf to access the grant funds. This limits tax liability for our grant recipients and ensures member accountability for how the dues contributions are being spent.

The six members of the selection committee will spend the next few weeks reading the proposed projects before gathering on May 17th-19th for in-person deliberations in Natomas.

They use the strength-based matrix (right) as the lens when considering each application.

Real-world, strength-based connections at the 2019 Teacher Innovation Expo

Ann Jensen, an Expo presenter from Western High School’s Link Crew, got reacquainted with the energetic Dr. Al Rabanera, one of her former students in Anaheim in 1999. Al now teaches Math at La Vista High School in Fullerton.

Expo presenter Brandy Haynes-Peters shared the passion she feels for her students and their work in coding and robotics at Eisenhower Elementary in Garden Grove.

IFT Staff Consultant, Dr. Anita Benitas, joked that when she met Wyatt Webb three years ago at the Expo, she was taller than he was. Now an eighth-grader, Wyatt is still an integral part of Lori Clock’s Spade Brigade Resiliency Garden at Gardenhill Elementary in La Mirada.