

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

– Albert Einstein



In its earliest incarnations, the public education system involved men, and later women, who dedicated themselves to their students in one-room schools or to small groups who met irregularly to learn how to read and write, how to reason and recite, how to think and invent. Whether studying Aristotle or Plato, Latin or Greek—or how to plow a straight furrow or cook a simple meal, students came to school to seek new knowledge and new ways to live and work.

They still do.

Today’s high schools have grown beyond one-room schools to become large institutions. Sometimes they are overcrowded, often under-funded, but thousands of students and teachers are succeeding every day in learning, achieving, and progressing. Most importantly, the relationship that matters most in our schools today is the same relationship that existed in those one- and two-room schoolhouses.

It is the relationship between teachers and students.

The California Teachers Association Institute for Teaching exists to support that relationship, to bolster its influence, and to provide an environment in which these nurtured relationships can foster meaningful learning. What it does that no other institute, association, corporation, foundation, or group can do is to galvanize the efforts of teachers, along with other stakeholders, to hold open the door for learning to take place. It can facilitate finding new ways to encourage teachers to work together and in partnership with others within the community to hold the space for revitalization of public education and a renewal of its commitment to excellence, allowing each and every student to achieve his or her ultimate goal.

The Institute was formed in 1967 by the Board of Directors of the California Teachers Association and established as an arms-length foundation- a 501(c)(3) corporation- to assist public education in ways that the Association alone was unable to address.

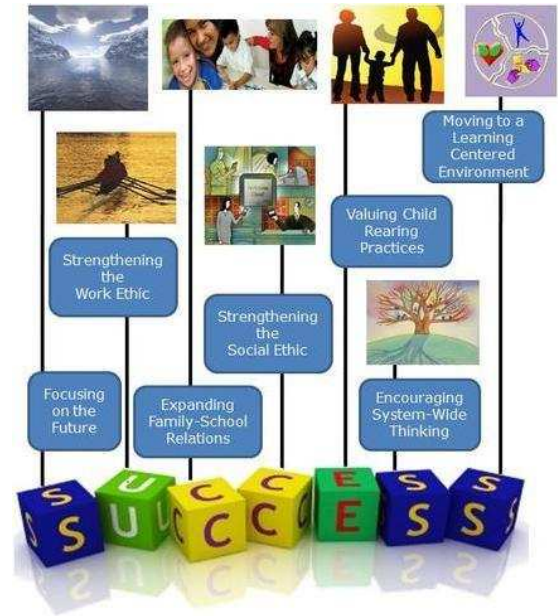
Since 2008, IFT has come under the umbrella of the CTA Foundation for Teaching and Learning, an independent nonprofit organization that supports CTA sponsored scholarships, awards, grants and disaster relief in support of teachers and students throughout California.



The IFT Approach

The CTA IFT is attempting to bring a new approach to school change. Based on our work with the Gates and Packard Foundations, the CTA IFT determined that school change must include two key factors: (1) It needs to be teacher driven and (2) It should be based on what is working and successful in our schools and classrooms.

By focusing on what works in our schools, the CTA IFT believes strength-based models for school change add a new dimension to school improvement. Strength-based models provide an asset-based approach that teachers can use to emphasize talents over weaknesses and strengths over deficits to create a learning environment that supports and encourages every student to do their best. What makes strengths-based approaches particularly important is they provide a clear focus and direction for teacher driven change. These changes can be incorporated into a plan of future action.



From one-on-one conversations, focus groups, and chapter feedback, the CTA IFT discovered a new sense of optimism and accomplishment when teachers were given the responsibility for describing what makes the teaching and learning process most successful. Using this knowledge, the CTA IFT found teachers to be no longer content to be only experts on school related problems – an approach that has often left our members frustrated and alienated from school improvement. As a result, the CTA IFT is now helping our chapters and members become experts on solutions, as they begin to change educational policy from the local level.

Current IFT Projects

Merced High School Positive Deviance Project

This project is designed to reduce dropouts under a grant from The Hewlett Foundation. A team from the Merced Union High School District attended the IFT Dropout Conference in August 2008 and then applied for and was accepted for this program. The initial meeting of Merced High School stakeholders was held in late February 2009, with Mark T. Munger, who is associated with The Positive Deviance Initiative of Tufts University, serving as the consultant.

The project is based on a fundamental idea. In every high school there are students that are practicing behaviors that are keeping them in school. In every high school there are teachers, administrators, and parents practicing behaviors that are keeping students in school.

The Positive Deviance Approach is designed to identify behaviors and practices that keep students in school and encourages the rest of the student community to adopt them. The IFT believes the potential for the Positive Deviance Approach to reduce high school dropouts is vast and largely untapped.

- ***Rio Linda High School Appreciative Inquiry Project***

This project is designed to reduce dropouts and narrow the achievement gap. Initial meetings were held with a representative group of Rio Linda teachers, students, administrators and parents in December 2008. Subsequent meetings in January 2009 produced interview questions for all stakeholder groups and staff & student surveys were conducted in March. Dr. Yale Wishnick of IFT, who is serving as the facilitator of this project, met with the Rio Linda H.S. staff to review the survey results in September 2009.

The project is a system-wide search for the best in our school community. In its broadest terms, the Rio Linda Project involves a discovery of what gives energy, excitement and joy to the school community. By emphasizing affirmative over deficit methods, we may be more likely to increase our ability to identify factors leading to productive, sustainable high school change.

- ***Early Childhood Education Alliance***

This project was established with the support of the Packard Foundation to train and inform CTA members, leaders and staff on strength-based models in Early Childhood Education. The IFT, in partnership with iCoHere Inc., designed a virtual conference entitled ***What Works: Strengths-Based Approaches to Early Childhood Education***. The goal was to provide support to preschool teachers and other ECE professionals by honoring their existing strengths and encouraging them to apply these strengths in new ways in their classrooms.

The conference was co-sponsored by Preschool California, America's Promise Alliance, the American Association of College Teachers of Education and WASC. Nearly 700 ECE practitioners registered for the online conference during the three weeks from October 27 - November 13, 2009. The conference resembled a typical face-to-face conference, with featured speakers, panelists and case studies of shining examples. Response from participants was enthusiastic. Said one, "Thank you for your interest in children and helping us all see that by looking at strengths, we can often help children more than looking at the problems." IFT will continue to examine ways to use technology to bring educators together and to support quality early childhood education programs.

- ***The Algebra Project Twin Rivers***

This project began with two teachers from Allison Elementary School who were inspired by the work of Bob Moses and the Algebra Project. While the project grew over the course of two years to become a larger partnership involving the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community/IAF, the CTA IFT, the Twin Rivers Unified School District and UC Davis CRESS Center, it has remained true to the ideals and vision of the teachers who conceived it.

Recognizing that algebra is a gate-keeper course for higher mathematics, the purpose of the APTR is to support algebraic reasoning in the upper elementary grades; prepare students for middle grades mathematics and Algebra 1 by the eighth grade, thus, preparing students for college preparatory mathematics in high school, and the mathematical knowledge required for college entrance, success in college courses, and lifelong civic engagement.

The Algebra Project uses mathematics as an organizing tool to ensure quality public school education. As such, APTR brings together and engages families, students, teachers, administrators, and community members in ways that support student well-being and collaborative community school partnerships.

More information about the CTA-IFT is available on our website-

www.teacherdrivenchange.org

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