



California Teachers Association Foundation for Teaching & Learning

CTA Institute for Teaching

**CTA Board Report:
November 18, 2008**

Liane Cismowski Appointed to the CTA IFT Board of Directors

It was all smiles when Liane Cismowski was recommended and approved as a member of the CTA IFT Board of Directors. While most teachers may not know Liane, her face and voice are well known to CTA members. The former Contra Costa County teacher was found to be a natural spokesperson for teachers and students on CTA TV Commercials and has played a major role in CTA's public relations programs. Cismowski is a National Board Certified Teacher in Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts (2001). In 2006 she was named the California Affiliate Nominee for the NEA Award for Teaching Excellence. Liane is on the Executive Board of the Mount Diablo Education Association. She has lead the Mt. Diablo National Board Certification candidate support group for the past six years. Ms. Cismowski is also a faculty member for the Masters of Arts in Teaching Leadership Program at St. Mary's College, California. According to CTA IFT Board members, Liane will play a critical role in shaping and encouraging school change that makes sense for teachers and California's children.



Upcoming Events

CTA IFT Board Meeting

- February 2, 2009, 10 am – 2 pm
- April 8, 2009, 10 am – 2 pm

CTA IFT Board retreat

- June 11, 2009, 10 am – 2 pm

Ongoing CTA IFT Conversations Around School Change

- UCD School of Education
- USC Integrated Media Systems
- Twin Rivers United Educators & Twin Rivers Unified School District
- WestEd & CDE
- UCSB California Dropout Research Project
- Case Western Reserve University Appreciative Inquiry Commons
- Cultural Change Institute, Tufts University
- Positive Deviance Institute, Tufts University
- Cohere Virtual Communities Network

Merced High School Receives CTA IFT Grant

Merced High School was awarded the CTA IFT Grant to reduce high school dropouts. The Merced Union High School District Teachers Association and the Merced Union High School District jointly applied for the CTA IFT Grant. Merced High School, which has 2562 students, will be the first high in the United States that will use the Positive Deviance Approach to reduce high school dropouts. Positive Deviance suggests that in every community there are certain individuals (the Positive Deviants) whose special behaviors and practices enable them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbors who have access to the same resources. For the dropout problem this means that there are students (with the support of teachers and other school-community stakeholders) who utilize specific behaviors and practices to stay in school when other students with access to the same resources drop out.

Instrumental in applying for this Grant was the Merced Union High School District Teachers Association Chapter President, Sheila Whitley. Sheila organized and brought over 12 teachers, administrators, board members and parents to the CTA IFT Dropout Conference to find out about the Grant to reduce high school dropouts. Convinced that teachers and local CTA chapters need to play a critical role in school change, President Whitley is making *teacher driven change* a reality. To see a copy of the CTA IFT Grant (Hewlett Foundation) Grant go to:

<http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/DropoutGrantHewlett.pdf>

CTA IFT Early Childhood Education Alliance (ECEA).

□ With the remaining funds from the Packard Foundation Preschool Grant, the CTA IFT, with a number of key partners, will create a statewide *virtual* Early Childhood Education Alliance (ECEA). The CTA IFT, working with CTA members, leaders, and staff, will establish a teacher-driven, sustainable, and far-reaching network to show how early childhood thinking can act as a catalyst for school change. At a time when externally driven standards, outcomes, and curriculum are driving the change process, the CTA IFT believes we can all learn from the student-centered, developmental thinking that exists in ECE.



□ The ECEA will be supported through virtual and face-to-face connections where P – 14 school community stakeholders can work and learn together to create a culture of success for all students based on the premise that a highly balanced and diverse early childhood education learning environment is essential to the overall academic and social success for children.

□ The IFT will make every effort to work closely with the CTA State Council ECE Committee and local CTA chapters by creating ongoing strength-based initiatives that will:

- 1) Increase communication and collaboration among and between all P – 14 school community stakeholders.
- 2) Increase the autonomy, value, and role of early childhood educators within all sectors of the school-community.
- 3) Identify new strategies for increasing and sustaining parent and family involvement in all aspects of their children's education.
- 4) Apply strength-based organizing strategies to school change.
- 5) Integrate child-centered practices, where appropriate, throughout the P – 14 system.
- 6) Provide information and updates on the progress of the ECEA at CTA conferences including, but not limited to, the Good Teaching Conferences, Regional Conferences, and Rural and Urban Issues Conferences.

The Future of School Change

The CTA IFT believes that *teacher driven change* initiatives lead to authentic school improvement for all students. The CTA IFT believes that conventional school reform is unlikely to improve standards, accountability, and student performance – all goals currently voiced and promoted by most educational reform advocates.

Specifically, by increasing the capacity of teachers to focus on talents, strengths, and positive behaviors, we are more likely to create a successful learning environment for all students. Along these lines, the CTA IFT will develop and organize an ongoing data collection program to assess *teacher driven change* initiatives taking place around the state. The CTA IFT will categorize and archive what is taking place within local school-communities with the goal of providing resources, expertise, and knowledge to CTA members, leaders, and staff.

Finally, the CTA IFT intends to support teacher experimentation and entrepreneurial thinking as an alternative to externally driven top-down reform measures that are draining valuable resources and frustrating CTA members, leaders, and staff.

The Role of the Community

The CTA IFT has worked to involve and expand the role of school community stakeholders to increase student performance and outcomes by embracing learning over teaching, collaboration over isolation, and asset or strength-based thinking over deficit thinking.

The CTA IFT has had the opportunity to begin and continue discussions with community leaders and business representatives on topics associated with public education improvement and change.

Specifically, the CTA IFT has been able to develop both alliances and community-based programs in support of school change initiatives that are driven by teachers and parents.

This represents a critical shift from traditional top down approaches to building effective public schools that promote high expectations, smaller, more personalized learning environments, and a relevant academic experience for California's diverse student population.