



California Teachers Association *Foundation for Teaching & Learning*

CTA Institute for Teaching

**CTA Board Report:
September 8, 2008**

IFT Conference: A New Approach to Reduce High School Dropouts

Teachers, counselors, special educators, Chapter leaders, CTA staff, and administrators came together for two days with parents and educational policy leaders with the goal of examining how a strength-based approach can be utilized to reduce high school dropouts. Conference participants learned how focusing on school-wide assets encouraged greater creativity and innovation as well as increased commitment and mutual support. Presenters discussed with participants how the use of strength-based approaches lead to increased individual and collective empowerment. Traditional school change models and professional development concentrate on deficit based approaches, ignoring the strengths and experiences of teachers. In a strengths-based approach the focus is on the individual not the content or the program. Drawing on the most positive factors leading to a school community culture of success, strengths-based methodologies do not ignore problems. Instead they shift the frame of reference to define and rethink the issues. By focusing on *what is working well*, change initiatives are more likely to be sustained.

What a Culture of Success Might Look Like

The IFT has been working with the Cultural Change Institute, Tufts University to examine possible factors that drive and resist a school culture of success. (This work began with the IFT Appreciative Inquiry student and parent interviews that resulted in a set of factors supporting a culture of success) The creation of a culture of success for all students is driven by a composite of parent, teacher, and administrator values and beliefs that are aligned in a dynamic set of symbiotic relationships. Within a culture of success, parents, teachers, and administrators work together for the singular purpose of creating a school-community where all students are successful. For a culture of success to exist, parents must view the education of their children as a top priority. Parents must play a supportive role as an active participant in their child's education. Building on this foundation, teachers need to create the proper teaching and learning environment that appreciates and cultivates the potential of every student. Finally, the administration must provide a supportive system-wide environment for teachers, students and parents so that the talents of each individual student are transformed into their strengths. This environment requires administrative leadership that promotes a sense of commitment and mutually shared trust so that all school community stakeholders believe they can explore every possibility to make sure every student succeeds.

**Keep Up with the IFT CTA
www.TeacherDrivenChange.org**

Upcoming Events

- CTA IFT Board Meeting
September 19, 10 am – 2 pm
- Dropout Grant Application Due
September 30, 2008
- CTA IFT Board Meeting
November 13, 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

The Positive Deviance Approach to End the Dropout Epidemic

- 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 a quick, low cost method to identify behaviors and practices that are keeping students in school
- The Positive Deviance Approach has been used successfully in a variety of different venues and conditions.
- The potential for the Positive Deviance Approach to reduce high school dropouts is vast and largely untapped

PD Statewide Planning Team

The CTA IFT hopes you will consider becoming part of the *Positive Deviance Statewide Planning Team*. This Team, as described in the CTA IFT Dropout Grant (See the Link Below) <http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/DropoutGrantHewlett.pdf> will include CTA and CTA IFT Board Members, local and state leaders, CTA staff, CTA members, school administrators, community representatives, high school students, and parents of high school students. Participants will be ethnically, gender, and geographically diverse. Members of the planning team will be trained in the Positive Deviance Approach. Please contact the CTA IFT at IFT@CTA.org or phone 916-212-9297 if you would like to be part of the Planning Team or would like more information.

Real Change: Ask Teachers What Works

It is becoming increasingly clear that the cure to the dropout problem will not likely result from any particular reform initiative, strategic plan, or political mandate. While the accumulation of research data is important and serious conversations on student dropouts are essential, targeting teachers or what teachers do as the problem have not produced any beneficial results. By focusing on what works in our schools, we can use the strengths and talents of teachers to create the desired change we need today.

Positive Deviance Defined

Using the Positive Deviance Approach we move from *theory to practice*. The Positive Deviance Approach is a developmental change model that is based on the premise that solutions to community problems already exist within the community. The Positive Deviance Approach differs from traditional problem-solving models in that it does not recruit outside experts to solve problems. Instead it seeks to identify and optimize existing resources and solutions within the community to solve community problems. The Positive Deviance Approach asks us to focus our attention on what works in our schools – behaviors & practices – by paying attention to students that graduate and what their parents and teachers are doing to create a *culture of success* for these students.

*A special thanks to the
CTA Board for its
ongoing support
of the IFT.*

CTA IFT Board Reports can now be found at:
www.TeacherDrivenChange.org