



California Teachers Association *Foundation for Teaching & Learning*

CTA Institute for Teaching

**CTA Board Report:
July 14, 2008**

School Change May Simply Be a State of Mind

A KEY LEARNING from our High School Outreach Program was that teachers are more willing to participate in school change when they are part of the solution, not the problem. In other words, teachers do not want to be the **object** of school reform, they want to be part of the team. While this would seem to be a reasonable request, rarely are the ideas, experiences, and wisdom of teachers considered by internal or external consultants. When teachers are viewed as assets and appreciated for their strengths, the IFT has found teachers more than willing to participate in the school change process.

Deficit & Strength-Based Thinking

Generally speaking, deficit thinkers search for someone or something that is causing a gap between the *unacceptable status quo* and the *desired outcome*. Using traditional gap analysis, most school reformers are *stuck* in research methods guided by two critical questions: (1) Where are we? and (2) Where do we want to be? The logical framework for the deficit model requires a quantitative search for an explanation as to why the gap exists and how it can be closed. On the other hand, a strength-based approach focuses on *what we want to accomplish*, not from an ideal, but rather from what already exists in a district, school, classroom, or school community.

Strength-Based Thinking & Teacher Professionalism

In other words, strength based thinking is grounded in reality – not a theoretical model of what might be -- and identifies the behaviors and practices that are producing the desired outcomes. Teachers tell us that they like the way a strength-based approach feels. *There's a lot of talk of teacher professionalism today. It comes in many shapes and sizes. For example, there are small learning communities, professional learning communities, teacher learning communities, etc., all of which mean nothing if teachers are still viewed as the problem.*

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

Upcoming Events

- **Ending the Dropout Epidemic**
 - August 29 – 30, 2008
 - Sacramento
 - CTA Region 2 Building

- **An Evening with Lawrence Harrison, Director of the Cultural Change Institute**
 - August 30, 2008
 - Sacramento

- **CTA IFT Board Meeting**
September 19, 10 am – 2 pm

- **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

End the Dropout Epidemic: Focusing on What Works

August 29 - 30, 2008
4100 Truxel Road, Sacramento
CTA Region 2 Building
8:30 am - 5:00 pm

Why do students stay in school? What do parents do each and every day to make sure their daughters and sons appreciate and value education? What do teachers do to keep students in school? How do we begin to identify and replicate the behaviors and practices that support student retention and graduation rates? These questions and others will help guide the CTA IFT Hewlett Foundation Grant to dramatically reduce high school dropouts. Beginning with a few high schools, the CTA IFT will utilize the Positive Deviance Approach – an approach designed to identify what works well in each school-community – to end the dropout epidemic and insure academic and social success for all students.

The Positive Deviance Approach is a developmental approach 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 by paying attention to students that graduate and what their parents and teachers are doing to create a culture of success for these students.

Conversations Need a Positive Focus

For a topic as complex as high school dropouts, it will take more than conversations to dramatically increase student retention and graduation rates. Using the Positive Deviance Approach, however, students, teachers, administrators, and parents can actually investigate the behaviors and practices of their respective groups to determine which behaviors and practices are aligned with and encourage student retention and graduation. While a number of public and private organizations advocate for dramatic changes in our schools (making classes more interesting, enforcing truancy laws, increasing the number of role models, offering financial assistance and support, and reducing poverty, violence, and drugs) in order to reduce high school dropouts, there is little evidence of success when dropouts are framed as a problem to be solved.

Teachers Tell Us: Let's Focus on What Works

In fact, 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 produce any beneficial results.

CTA IFT Board Member Refugio I. Rochin



Refugio I. Rochin, Ph.D. is a key member of the CTA IFT Board of Directors. Dr. Rochin can always be counted on to ask the *right question* and present a sense of perspective for the IFT Board to consider.

A man of multiple talents and experiences, Refugio is a true believer when it comes to the public schools and the important and vital role classroom teachers play in school improvement.

Dr. Rochin is Professor Emeritus in Chicana/o Studies and Agricultural & Resource Economics at the University of California, Davis. He served recently as the Executive Director of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Latinos and Native Americans in Science. He was the first permanent director of the Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University.

Go to www.TeacherDrivenChange.org to register for the CTA IFT Dropout Conference.