

## Support Builds for New Stanford Alliance for Instructional Excellence

By Rebecca Tseng Smith

As part of efforts to provide quality professional development opportunities for K-12 classroom teachers, a key priority of The Stanford Challenge's Initiative on Improving K-12 Education, the K-12 faculty steering committee is moving forward with plans to develop a new center for teacher professional development at Stanford.

Envisioned as a learning center that would support, coordinate, and enhance programs for K-12 teachers, the Stanford Alliance for Instructional Excellence seeks to expand Stanford's outreach to K-12 schools. By connecting faculty from across the university who wish to share rich subject matter content with teachers, with faculty experienced in writing curriculum and training teachers, and who are currently working with districts and schools, the center will offer powerful programs to help K-12 teachers enrich their understanding of subject matter and enhance their pedagogical skills.

Helen Quinn, Stanford physics professor and co-chair of the K-12 Initiative, said one of the center's pilot programs will be a science workshop series for elementary school teachers. Quinn, who has worked with many teachers over her career, said, "Elementary teachers often list science, particularly physical science, as the area that they feel least comfortable teaching. There is a huge unmet need for professional development, ongoing support, and mentoring in this area."

K-12 faculty steering committee member and Professor Guadalupe Valdes envisions workshops for language teachers that will renew their love of the language they teach. "Language teachers spend their college years attending lectures and movies, and learning and conversing in the language they are studying," said Valdes. "But when they go out to teach in schools, no one



Professor Pam Grossman, a member of the K-12 faculty steering committee, is helping lead efforts to develop the Stanford Alliance for Instructional Excellence.

else speaks the language. By bringing language teachers together, we hope that the workshops will reenergize them and help them develop innovative ways to engage their students."

Plans for the new center have already attracted the interest and support of two funders. Lauren Dachs (BA '72), Nonie Ramsay (MBA '79), and Susan Harvey of the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation have provided invaluable advice that has featured strongly in the development of the center. As a critical first step in the center's development, the Bechtel Foundation, which is a major supporter of K-12 science education, awarded a \$140,000 grant in March to fund the position of the center's director for the first year.

"We look forward to watching the center identify and establish new models for how research universities can work constructively with K-12 teachers," said S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation President Lauren Dachs. "With Stanford's disciplinary knowledge in math and science and the School of Education's expertise in teacher professional development, we think this is a strategy worth funding."

Stanford alumna Diana Chang (BA '77, MBA '81) also developed a strong interest

in the center after she spoke with Dean Deborah Stipek to learn more about the K-12 Initiative. After reviewing the center's plans, she and her husband William decided to provide sustained support for the director position by making a gift of \$300,000 to fund the second and third year of the director's salary.

"When Will and I first heard President Hennessy talk about his aspirations for The Stanford Challenge, we were most drawn to the K-12 Initiative because we have a strong interest in improving our schools," said Chang. "Establishing a new teacher development center makes a lot of sense to us, and we are excited to help bring it to life."

The Stanford Alliance for Instructional Excellence is one of the first focused areas to emerge from the work of the K-12 faculty steering committee, which has identified three primary areas of concentration for the K-12 Initiative. Along with teacher professional development, the Initiative also seeks to make a difference in education policy and school leadership.

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