

Reflections From Banff

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The International Summit on the Teaching Profession was held in Banff, Canada in March. The scenery and hotel in Banff were just as beautiful as what was happening inside its walls. Countries came together from across the globe to collaborate on the teaching profession.

The Department of Education invited teachers and one principal to be a part of the United States delegation this year. This is a testament to their commitment to teacher leadership. They planted the seeds of teacher leadership with the Teach to Lead Initiative and allow it to bloom by modeling what teacher leadership looks like when you cultivate and empower teachers to flourish as visionary leaders.

The invitation of this group of teachers was not just part of the backdrop. Our voices were not only welcomed and heard; our ideas were put into action in the commitments made by the USDOE at the conclusion of the summit.

Secretary Duncan initiated the International Summit in 2011. Little did he know four years ago, when the United States hosted the first international Summit in New York, that it would become an international community of practice dedicated to enhancing the teaching profession to improve learning for all students.

NNSTOY has a long history of being a part of the International Summit since the beginning. Marguerite Izzo, the 2007 New York Teacher of the Year, was on the planning committee and was the official delegate teacher representative from the United States the first two years, sitting beside Secretary Duncan at the table. It is a testament to our NNSTOY organization and the commitment we have to the profession that we continue to be invited.

While at the summit, the United States teachers convened a meeting with Canadian, Dutch, German and Estonian teachers. We have followed up with this group of teachers to continue our discussions from the summit, build upon them and learn from each other. We are working on creating an international team of teachers exchanging ideas and working to advance teacher leadership and innovation across the globe.

Each country makes three commitments to move education forward over the next year in their respective countries. They report back in a year on their progress with their commitments at the next summit.

The teachers and principal representative were invited into the United States commitment meeting to share our thoughts.

The sense of responsibility we had to our United States teachers and students during that discussion was not overwhelming to me, it was actually empowering. It was giving voice to those who didn't have a chair at this meeting. I found my voice to articulate the importance of allowing teachers to not only hold a seat at the table but to allow them to set the table and hand out the menus. Each of the teacher representatives and principal were engaged in the conversation and I felt that our voices were not only being heard, they were valued.

The three commitments from the United States were:

- Continue to work to increase the number of children with access to high-quality early learning and encourage teacher leadership in this regard.
- Work to increase access for learners of all ages to high-quality career and technical education and encourage teacher leadership in this regard.
- Convene summit in the U.S. to highlight teacher leadership and expand teacher leadership opportunities.

The teaching ambassador fellows at the United States Department of Education had written a proposal for a United States Summit in their long-term strategy session in January. They were thrilled that we echoed their sentiment in Canada and that the commitment was made to hold a U.S. Summit over the next year.

The Department of Education has asked all of the United States teachers that attended the summit to be a part of the planning and implementing process of the U.S. Summit that will be modeled after the International Summit. It is refreshing to have someone appreciate our voice and believe in our abilities to contribute to this process.

At the conclusion of the summit the teachers from the U.S. delegation and one principal representative decided that we wanted to take a nature walk on the beautiful trails outside of the hotel. We met in the lobby to begin our adventure and Secretary Duncan had decided to join us.

It was nice to get to know Secretary Duncan on a more personal level while walking. I am 5' tall and Secretary Duncan is 6'5" so for every one of his steps I took four to keep up. I gleaned a few things during this walk, besides the fact that I'm out of shape. I learned that he values teacher voice and appreciates honest conversations. He wanted our thoughts on solutions to the problems being discussed across the nation. I learned that he understands that he doesn't have all of the answers but he knows to look to the experts, the teachers, for guidance.

Secretary Duncan and I might not see eye to eye due to our height difference but we do see eye to eye on teacher leadership.

After leaving the Summit I'm excited. I'm excited to know that the work that is being done around teacher leadership is building momentum nationally as well as internationally. I feel empowered knowing there is a global focus on elevating our profession for the success of our students.