

The Ambassador

Teaching Ambassador Fellowship

Jocelyn Pickford, Office of the Secretary (OS), first suggested the concept of bringing in classroom teachers to provide input to the Department of Education when she served as a White House Fellow. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings also envisioned embedding classroom teachers in the Department to provide perspective from today's schools, while simultaneously giving the teachers insight into ED. After Pickford's Fellowship ended, Secretary Spellings brought her to ED to implement their joint vision in the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship.

The ED Fellowship has set four goals:

1. Recognize and retain motivated and innovative public school teachers, and provide them with

the opportunity to expand their leadership roles outside the classroom;

2. Improve education programs and policies by strengthening the connection to practical knowledge about classroom realities;
3. Highlight teachers' voices within the education community and the country at large;
4. Encourage principals to work with teacher fellows to foster continued collaboration at the school level.

Ultimately, as Pickford stated, "the whole fellowship is about conversation."

"The most important thing that happens in education is the interaction between the adult and child. I believe a fundamental role of the US Department of Education is to support the quality of those interactions."
Gillian Cohen-Boyer
(OII)

Learning About the Education Department

Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellows

Coming to Washington to work in the Education Department entailed a few unanticipated adjustments. First, we quickly learned to use the acronym "ED" for the Department of Education, instead of "DoE," which is the Department of Energy.

Second, we who will remain in Washington anticipate missing the delightful hubbub of children's voices – and a few Fellows plan to become involved in ED's tutoring of local schoolchildren!

We quickly acclimated ourselves, though, to leaving work without the added weight of projects in our bags!

A third mental adjustment of ours was recognizing the complexity of

every office, and many smaller subsets of offices. Their representatives introduced themselves at our summit and described their roles within the Department. Our heads spun after two days; we had no idea that the Department contained so many programs, grants and opportunities!

Our final, and most impressive adjustment was realizing that the federal government provides no input into curriculum and instruction, and relatively little funding. In fact, only 9% of the states' budgets for education come from ED!

We certainly drank from the proverbial fire hydrant that first week!



Nicora Placa, New York, listens as Luther Sewell, Delaware, speaks to Secretary Spellings about the fellows' goals for the year.

Discussing No Child Left Behind

Julie Shively, Georgia

Sitting down with Deputy Secretary Ray Simon opened my eyes to the history, myths, and possibilities of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

He reminded us that NCLB is the new name of President Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Every president since Johnson amended the ESEA, but NCLB marks the first enforcement of the education standards that states established. Deputy Secretary Simon emphasized that we have no national education system. NCLB simply holds each state accountable for student achievement, according to the state's standards.

He outlined four keys common to successful schools, which he called "2014 Is Today" schools, as a result of implementing NCLB:

1. Teachers know what to do and believe they can do it.
2. Teachers communicate their expectations to their students.

3. Teachers have data of students' performance and use it daily to make instructional decisions.
4. A strong principal leads the schools and supports teachers.

The most surprising fact that we learned and will convey to our colleagues is that the word "fail" does not appear anywhere in the NCLB Act.

"You can either make the system work for you or you can work for the system," the deputy secretary said several times during our roundtable. He encouraged us to look beyond a policy that on the surface may not make sense to discover its background and purpose.

He said that he wished that he could bring to each child the belief of success. "All children want someone to believe in them," he said. He challenged us to be that person by looking at the whole picture and deciding how to act and share what we learn about ED and NCLB.

"The biggest single myth about NCLB is that one size fits all."
Deputy Education Secretary Raymond Simon

The Summer Summit Experience

Jenny Cloud, Rhode Island

Now that I'm back home, I have tried to describe to many different people the summit and what we will be doing as classroom fellows. Every account I give is different. I am still processing all of the information we received in just four days. Personally, I came across many projects, programs, initiatives, and ideas that are close to my heart. As I consider each of them, I alter my view of the summit and my upcoming role in the fellowship. Two constants, however, remain in my memory. I always include in my accounts experiencing the passion for teaching and students that

emanated from each of the fellows. It was inspiring. They were inspiring. Second, every time I explain the fellowship to others, I am struck by the sense of empowerment that I gained and now want other teachers to feel. I think teachers often feel removed from policy and frustrated that they believe they are forced to react to it instead of participate in it. They may feel all-powerful in their own classrooms, but when it comes to policy they feel powerless. This doesn't have to be the case, as the summit week clearly showed me. We as teachers try to convince our students that knowledge is power, and I am more convinced of that than I ever was before.

Communicating Education Policy to the Public

The Education Department relies on the Office of Communication and Outreach (OCO) to define, frame, and package everything that ED does. That includes reviewing anything that we fellows say or write when we use our positions as ED employees, to ensure accuracy regarding policies and programs. In fact, every fellow is assigned a media representative to assist in all our external communications. Although a little disconcerting at first, we know that this is not inhibit what we say, but sometimes how we say it.

One of OCO's many duties is to broadcast a monthly live television show, aired on local PBS stations, that hosts teachers, principals, and other educators to discuss predetermined topics.

OCO also staffs the Information Resource Center, which responds to calls and e-mails from the public regarding anything related to education. The phone number and e-mail address are: 1-800-USA-LEARN

and answers.ed.gov

Their extensive print publications include the [Helping Your Child](#) series.

ED's on-line resources are great; check out two of them!

<http://www.free.ed.gov/index.cfm>

<http://dww.ed.gov>

Another form of communication, also within OCO, from ED to states and local government, is through the Secretary's Regional Representatives (SRR), the Secretary's eyes and ears on the ground for local issues. The U.S. is divided into ten regions, each with an SSR. This is an excellent source for the fellows to help establish state and regional contacts to disseminate information to a wider audience.

"This building is full of teachers!"
Assistant Deputy Secretary Douglas Mesecar (OII), former teacher



Anna Walker, Maine, enjoying the summit experience

Speaking With Education Secretary Margaret Spellings

Secretary Spellings began her talk with the fellows by stating that, "The saddest words the President hears are 'I used to be a teacher.'" Seeing the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship as a venue to give teachers voices, she challenged the fellows to think of other ways to give teachers voice within the existing structure. She said

she expected the Fellows to add high value to education policies by speaking up in the Department and sharing their experiences in the classroom.

Secretary Spellings challenged the fellows to think about and address how they, and ED, can recruit and retain excellent teachers

Pointers From Outside Agencies



Cheri Isgreen, Colorado, speaks with her principal during day four.

On the fourth day of the summit, a panel of outside agencies that work on education issues met with the fellows, consisting of GlaxoSmith Klein, Teach for America, the Einstein Fellowship, American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, Education Trust, and the National Institute of Excellence in Teaching. They suggested six ways that teacher leaders could create change:

1. Educators should not be afraid to approach companies for financial help. Companies want to help!
2. Teachers should spend time on Capitol Hill or at federal agencies to bring insight to the people who are working on education policy.
3. Teachers need to record everything that happens in the classroom because that is the raw data that can be used to change policy. Teachers should also invite the public, into classrooms to see what it is like on the front lines.
4. Teachers need to ensure that those elected to school boards truly care about children.
5. Teachers need certain background information to change policy. For example, they should
 - a. Know how the money is being spent, and what policies and practices are effective;
 - b. Gather data from their classrooms and schools;
 - c. Increase their knowledge of policies; review them critically, and learn how to articulate flaws;
 - d. Begin at the local level.
6. Teachers need to understand the nuts and bolts of policy development, connect with different organizations, learn how they affect local schools, reflect, and speak up!

"I am awed by the quality of talent and experience of the fellows I will be privileged to work with this year. By traveling to DC and participating in the summit, I was pleased to learn the ED staff are real people-warm, caring, and really sharp-not mindless bureaucrats, which is the perception of folks in the "hinterland." I feel very honored and excited to work with everyone."

Cheri Isgreen, Colorado

The Originators of the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship

Jocelyn Pickford's heart and soul have always been with instructing children. After teaching high school literature for four years, she arrived at the Education Department via a White House fellowship and quickly ensconced herself. She fostered the idea of classroom teachers contributing to ED's policies as they communicate to their districts the role

and programs of ED.

Gillian Cohen-Boyer has worked in the Education Department for eight years in an effort to help children and schools. Now the fellowship's program manager, Cohen-Boyer will continue the work she and Pickford began with the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship after Pickford departs in January.

Meeting Mrs. Bush

Steven Hicks - California

On the third day of the summit, the fellows experienced the rare opportunity of enjoying an intimate conversation with First Lady Laura Bush about education. Mrs. Bush expressed her belief that teachers do the most important job and it is critical for them to talk to the government, both at the federal and state levels. She emphasized that teachers need to tell policy-makers how the federal law affects teachers and to recognize the role of the federal government versus that of the state.

Mrs. Bush advised the fellows not to underestimate the power of the Internet and to keep Americans focused on public education. She said she feels the greatest need is to recruit excellent teachers. The first lady also emphasized mentor teachers as an important factor in teacher retention. When asked if the federal government could take a leadership role in prioritizing early intervention and supporting universal preschool, Mrs. Bush said that it was a financial issue and a matter of convincing legislators to reprioritize and move early childhood education to the top of the agenda.

Many of the fellows expressed their individual passions about education issues, from reducing the dropout rate in poorer communities to improving teacher quality. The group also highlighted its goals for the fellowship year: greater collaboration among the stakeholders at schools, utilizing teacher voices at the federal level, and recognizing and developing teacher leaders

through programs such as the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship Program. Another important goal is to strengthen the connection between federal policy and what happens in the classroom. Like the old game of telephone where a message is passed around the circle, sometimes the intention of federal policy does not always result in the desired effect.

Mrs. Bush concluded the discussion by reminding the fellows that students are able to achieve more than they are given credit for, underscoring the need for rigorous standards. Secretary Spellings pointed out that 99 percent of parents say that the information they receive about education comes from teachers. The fellows, like all teachers, truly are ambassadors of listening, informing and clarifying for the public about teaching and learning.

"I only regret that we didn't do this [fellowship] sooner."
Secretary Spellings



First Lady Laura Bush (left) and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings listens to a Classroom Fellow talk about the realities of teaching.

The Teaching Ambassador Fellows

Steven Berbeco (Classroom) - Arabic Language, U.S. and world history, AP government and politics and Charlestown HS, Charlestown, Mass.

Stephanie Canada - Elementary physical education at Will Rogers Elementary School, Shawnee, Okla.

Jennifer Cloud (Classroom) - Math at South Kingstown HS, Wakefield, R.I.

Jonathan Eckert (D.C.) - 7th grade science at Poplar Grove MS, Franklin, Tenn.

Jeanine Gelhaus (Classroom) - 8th grade science at Medford MS, Medford, Wis.

Amy Goodman (Classroom) - Middle school literacy expert, Anchorage, Alaska

Steven Hicks (D.C.) - Kindergarten and first grade at Accelerated Charter School, Los Angeles, Calif.

Keil Hileman (Classroom) - American and world history, Monticello Trails MS, De Soto, Kan.

JoLisa Hoover (Classroom) - 4th grade, Grandview Hills ES, Leander, Texas

Bobbi Houtchens (D.C.) - ESL and English, Arroyo Valley HS, San Bernardino, Calif.

Hector Ibarra (Classroom) - 6th/7th grade science, West Branch MS, West Branch, Iowa

Cheri Isgreen (Classroom) - K-5 art, Cottonwood ES and Northside ES, Montrose, Colo.

Jennifer Kellogg-Andrus (Classroom) - AP, freshman biology, Watertown HS, Watertown, S.D.

Eric Kinne (Classroom) - English, Fairfax HS, Fairfax, Va.

James Liou (Classroom Fellow) - History, civics education, Boston Community Leadership Academy, Boston, Mass.

Maya Martin-Bugg (Classroom) - 8th grade language arts, Durham School of the Arts, Durham, N.C.

Nicora Placa (Classroom) - 7th and 8th grade math, Emolior Academy, Bronx, N.Y.

Tammie Schrader (Classroom) - 7th grade math and science, Cheney MS, Cheney, Wash.

Luther Sewell (Classroom) - 5th grade math, Prestige Academy, Wilmington, Del.

Scott Sherman (Classroom) - World history, Hanna HS, Brownsville, Texas

Julie Shively (D.C.) - 2nd-5th grade gifted classes and 3rd-5th gifted math, Winn Holt ES, Lawrenceville, Ga.

Anne Claire Tejtel (Classroom) - Honors biology and health, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore, Md.

Stephanie Vickers (Classroom) - 6th grade math and reading, Pioneer Ridge MS, Independence, Mo.

Anna Walker (Classroom) - 3rd grade, Songo Locks ES, Naples, Maine.

Kristina Walrath (Classroom) - Mastery Charter Schools, Philadelphia, Penn.

You are encouraged to contact us through teacherfellowship@ed.gov

