

The Ambassador

REACHING OUT TO TEACHERS

Julie Shively (Lawrenceville, Ga.), editor

For this issue, I asked the Teaching Ambassador Fellows to describe one outreach task or “aha” moment that they experienced over the last two months. They overwhelmingly responded with examples of how they are reaching out to educators in their school, district, or state with what they have learned since becoming a fellow, or the excitement they still feel in being a teacher in the fellowship. It is refreshing to be a part of a program that says “hey, you can make a difference, and here’s how!” I hope that the following stories will

inspire you with what can be done once teachers feel empowered to use their talents to touch other

teachers and make a difference in the lives of children!

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

- * <http://www.tqsource.org/>
- * This is a national resource to strengthen teacher quality, especially in high-poverty areas.
- * Check out the online resource section on the left of the Web page!



Teaching Ambassador Fellow Anna Walker (left) discusses the National Math Panel findings with a fellow teacher after her workshop.

EDUCATORS WORKING AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

The classroom fellows often contribute to specific Department tasks, voicing their perspectives as teachers while broadening their knowledge of federal education policies and programs. For example, Washington fellow Jon Eckert (Franklin, Tenn.) and classroom fellows Tammie Schrader (Cheney, Wash.) and Nicora Placa (Bronx, N.Y.) drafted a non-regulatory guidance for the Teacher Incentive Fund grant recipi-

ents in plain-language, using the question-and-answer format.

This experience exposed the fellows to the intricacies of the federal grants process and opened their eyes to the challenges faced by federal agencies in implementing federal policy.

Taking advantage of the many opportunities provided by the fellowship re-energized Nicora as an educator. “This experience has pre-

sented many new challenges and “aha” moments. It has made me hopeful about the state of education in our country. When I have a bad day, I read an e-mail from one of the fellows and I feel proud to be a teacher.”

For more information about Teacher Incentive Fund grants, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherincentive/index.html>.

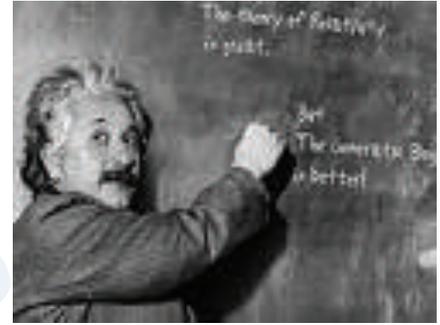
DISCUSSING THE NATIONAL MATH ADVISORY PANEL

In 2006, former President Bush created the National Math Advisory Panel to “foster greater knowledge of and improved performance in mathematics among American students.” For the next two years a diverse group of mathematicians and, yes, one math teacher, met, researched, discussed, and finally recommended ways to improve math education, specifically the preparation for algebra, based on the “best available scientific evidence.”

Anna Walker (Naples, Maine) used her December staff meeting to explain the National Math Advisory Panel Report findings to her teachers, identifying sections that pertained to elementary school teachers. Her discussion focused on the report’s areas of Curricular Content, Learning Process, and Instructional Practices. Anna re-

ported, “Our teachers have always questioned our math program, so some of the findings helped them to know the pros and cons of the program. They are interested in hearing more and talking more about the findings.”

Julie Shively (Lawrenceville, Ga.) gained a greater appreciation of the report and its impact upon mathematicians around the world when she attended the U.S.-China Math Experts Meeting, hosted by the Education Department, which focused on the National Math Advisory Panel’s findings. She listened to renowned mathematicians from both countries discuss math education, learning that, in the final analysis, the U.S. and China share the same goal: that of teaching math so that all students understand and love it. Both countries’ representatives articu-



Teachers don't have to be an Einstein to teach math, they just need to KNOW math

lated concern about their teachers’ apparent lack of deep math content knowledge, but expressed hope that in each country’s way that concern was being addressed. The openness in the exchange of ideas demonstrated the ability for two countries, so different politically, to find common ground in the education of their children.

See <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-report.pdf>
for the National Math Advisory Report online

FELLOWS’ OUTREACH IN CONTENT AREAS

Cheri Isgreen (Montrose, Colo.) feels deeply that art is not an “extra” subject that can be dropped at will, but a subject that makes the whole person. Fortunately, she lives in a state that also values art education, allowing her to delve deeply into promising practices for art education with the collaboration of her district, state, and a representative from the Education Department.

“It is so exciting to learn that the arts are on the cutting edge of 21st-century learning and that Colorado is leading this movement.” The Colorado Education Department’s Web site is featuring the Colorado arts study at <http://www.coloradoarts.com>

www.coloradoarts.com/news/releases/pressrelease_10-6-08.html

Keil Hileman (Shawnee, Kan.), a middle school social studies and artifacts connections teacher, is using his unique ability of connecting students with history through artifacts to reach out to other history teachers.

“I have been preparing to share samples of resources and promising instructional ideas with the Teaching American History Grant coordinators [at their conference held in early January]. This has allowed me to work closely

with other like-minded fellows through many early-morning conference calls. I am very excited to have had the time to collect and create educational resources that I shared with hundreds of professional educators across our nation. The most exciting part of this activity is the anticipation that thousands of children will work on the projects, view the video clips, and learn from these educational teaching tips. None of us will ever truly know the full extent of our teaching connections But it’s fun to imagine!”

REACHING TEACHERS THROUGHOUT DISTRICTS AND STATES

Many of the classroom fellows used their heightened credibility gained through the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship to reach out to their colleagues, sharing resources and information gained as a result of the fellowship.

Jeanine Gelhaus (Medford, Wis.), for example, led a workshop for the Wisconsin Educational Association Convention in Madison, Wis. called Using Travel for Professional Development. She explained how travel, research opportunities, fellowships, internships, and summer workshops could be folded into the Wisconsin Professional Development Plans as well as into the

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' portfolio, providing Web site examples of the opportunities afforded to teachers.

Anne Claire Tejtel (Baltimore, Md.) offered workshops to teachers in her district, introducing them to the resources that the Department of Education offers. She set up her workshop as a hands-on exploration of the Department's sites, including Doing What Works (<http://www.dww.ed.gov>), FREE (<http://www.free.ed.gov>), and the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative (<http://www.t2tweb.us>). She also showed the teachers how to access the National Math Advisory Panel Report

as well as all the free education publications at <http://edpubs.ed.gov>. Lastly, she sent the teachers to the American Stars of Teaching Web site (<http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tols/initiative/american-stars.html>) and explained how they could nominate a teacher for the American Stars of Teaching Award.

The teachers Anne Claire touched had not known about these resources and could not wait to continue their exploration. "It was so inspiring to be able to transmit all of ED's hard work and expertise to more teachers in order to enrich their instruction and ultimately benefit even more students."

{ "The Teaching Ambassador Fellowship continues to be an amazing experience."
Anne Claire Tejtel }

REACHING OUT TO TEACHERS IN THEIR OWN SCHOOLS

This winter the classroom fellows effectively used their status as Teaching Ambassador Fellows to convey information and resources from the Department of Education to the teachers at their schools.

Jensi Kellogg-Andrus (Watertown, S.D.) spoke for the fellowship when she stated, "One of my goals is to help my colleagues find resources that are available to them through the Education Department, share information that may help them get involved at the local, state, and federal levels, and give them venues in which they can have a voice on various topics concerning federal education policy."

Jensi exploited her school's regular in-service meetings to update her staff on new information and useful

resources. She also conducted a teacher discussion group to collect her school's views on the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the roles of the federal, state, and local education agencies. Jensi conducted teacher participation workshops to introduce them to the different sections in the Department's Doing What Works Web site, resulting in a teacher commenting, "I like to learn more about what is going on and this is one way I can actually help make a difference in the education of all children—I want to help make positive changes!"

Steven Berbeco (Boston, Mass.) recently observed that teacher empowerment begins at the school level. Therefore, he's been working on creating a stronger network of support upon which teachers at his school

could rely. For instance, he helped to institute a monthly faculty lecture series with a member of the staff delivering a short lecture on recent research that he or she is applying to the classroom. Boston University has agreed to send a respondent, a faculty member who can help drive the teachers' discussions.

He also reached out to his faculty to inform them of easy, small grant opportunities as part of his larger goal of bringing federal and state funding directly into the classroom.

Lastly, Steven peppered his school with information on how to nominate a teacher for Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. These three simple projects helped raise his school's morale while empowering the teachers around him.

FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Jon Eckert (Franklin, Tenn.)

Last year, I spent early November engaging my students in lab experiments, preparing to coach another basketball season, surviving my Vanderbilt doctoral program, and generally navigating the normal ups and downs of a 7th grade public school teacher.

This year, I spent early November in Muscat, Oman, participating in a meeting of education ministers from the G8 (Group of Eight countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States) and BMENA (Broader Middle East and North Africa).

I spoke as a teacher-representative of the G8 to education ministers and deputies of 27 countries, while a teacher from Tunisia represented the BMENA teacher perspective. We both addressed teacher quality as the key to improved student learning.

I focused on analyzing key U.S. issues such as the achievement gap; assessment and accountability; recruitment, retention, and distribution of effective teachers; and global competitiveness. I highlighted some of the promising programs and innovations that address issues of teacher quality.

After my presentation, former Secretary Margaret Spellings recommended interventions and encouraged other education ministries to consider programs such as the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship as a means to engage teachers in productive dialogues. After the session I talked with representatives from France, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. I truly felt like an ambassador.

In Oman, I discovered that countries worldwide are struggling, as we are

"I discovered that countries worldwide are struggling to improve teacher quality." Jon Eckert

in the United States, to improve teacher quality. The ministers' respect for teachers and their impact on student learning were encouraging. The Japanese delegates characterized teaching as a sacred profession. A professor from Singapore highlighted the importance of teachers in his country's success in math and science instruction. The Deputy Minister of Oman, a former teacher, repeatedly stated that regardless of curriculum, school buildings, or student background, teachers are the most important element in raising student achievement.

This was a tremendous learning opportunity, and I was proud to present on behalf of the fellowship. A testament to our profession and the fellowship is that any of the 24 other fellows could have been outstanding representatives.



Jon Eckert discussing education from the teacher's perspective at the G8/BMENA Ministerial Meeting

The “Elefante” in the Classroom: Hispanic Student Achievement and ELLs

Bobbi Houtchens (San Bernardino, Calif)

I wrote the following article for *AcceLLerate*, a newsletter from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, featuring articles written by K-12 experts on English language learners. The article is an outgrowth of a research proposal I presented to former Secretary Spellings to highlight educational research on Latino students and programs that are demonstrating success at eliminating the achievement gap for Latinos across the U.S.

As educators, we know full well that the day-to-day issues we face demand our complete and undivided attention. Unfortunately, this often prohibits us from taking a step back to examine larger issues that require immediate attention before they reach crisis states. I highly recommend that we stop now to take a serious look at the “elefante” in our classrooms—the “elefante” that is not going away; the “elefante” whose presence must be acknowledged and addressed. The “elefante” in this case is the Latino

student population and the quality of education we have (or have not) provided to these students.

The Looming Issue

It is no secret that the Latino student population faces many challenges. Making up about 9.8 million students in 2006, Latinos are the fastest-growing and youngest ethnic group in the United States. Latinos have a median age of 27, with 40 percent under the age of 19, and 25 percent under age 5. Based on the youth and explosive growth of Latinos over the past 15 years, experts predict that current demographic trends will continue for decades. When coupled with the fact that Latinos are also the poorest ethnic group—with a median income of \$20,124, and living at double the poverty rate of whites—the challenges of providing an equal education to these children are only exacerbated.

Language acquisition and immigration issues are the causal factors most

frequently blamed for the low performance of Latino students. However, one must realize that 77 percent of our Latino student population is native born, second and third-plus generation. This fact alone demonstrates that these two issues, while inarguably relevant, can no longer be used to explain away the difficulties Latinos seem to find in reaching academic success. Could the performance gap be a product of our education system itself?

We have seen improvement in the scores of Latino students as a targeted sub-group of *No Child Left Behind*, equal to the improvement seen by other groups. However, Latino students still lag 40 points behind white students, a rate that has remained virtually unchanged since the 1970's. Latino students have the highest dropout rate, 58 percent, which is 3.5 times higher than the dropout rate for white students. Clearly, the education system has not been able to get a handle on what it

“60 to 77 percent of our Latino student population is native born, depending on the statistics one looks at.” Bobbi Houtchens

takes to provide an appropriate education for Latino students or to help them find the path to excellence.

As if these statistics were not alarming enough, when we examine the teen pregnancy rates for Latinas, we actually see that the performance gap has the potential to get even worse. Since 2004, Latinas have had the highest teen pregnancy rate and teen birth rates of any ethnic group in the country. Fifty-three percent of Latinas become pregnant at least once before age 20, nearly twice the national average. In addition, Latina teen birth rates have declined only half

as fast those for as non-Latina white and non-Latina black teens. In 16 states and the District of Columbia, Latina teen birth rates have actually increased. Studies and common sense have already shown us that children born to teen mothers are less likely to succeed in school, are at greater risk of poverty, and are more likely to have health problems and to engage in problem behaviors. When we consider that 69 percent of Latina teen moms drop out of high school and, by 2025, one-quarter of all teens will be Latino, we can see that the education issues confronting Latinos in general will only increase unless we take action to change the

direction in which we are heading.

What Latinos Bring to the Table

Now that we have examined the dark side of this issue, we must spend equal time examining the beauty and strengths of our “elefante”. The Latino community brings many resources to the picture, e.g., strong, basic American values that contribute to the economic, cultural and political resources needed in our nation. Latinos are well-known for their strong family values, which include respect for the elderly, a child-centered culture, and support for the extended family. Latinos in the United States have a historical

Continued on page 7

WORKING WITH THE SECRETARY'S REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

JoLisa Hoover (Austin, Tex.)

Region VI's former Deputy Secretary's Regional Representative Tracy Young visited our campus at Grandview Elementary School for an afternoon in November. Tracy met with the school's teachers and principal before taking a tour of the school and giving a presentation to the students. The tour was during my class "flex" time, when many students are pulled out for various reasons. My

remaining six fourth-grade students gave the tour of the school, which was not only educational but also entertaining. The tour was definitely told from a fourth-grade point of view, including the importance of not throwing food in the cafeteria and how much it costs to replace a computer if you break it on purpose. At the end of the tour, Tracy spoke to all the fourth-grade students about her job and about her experience working

in the White House. She brought an "autographed" picture of Barney and Miss Beazley to show the students and stickers for all of them to take home. The visit ended with Tracy presenting me with a certificate and our class presenting Tracy with a class picture. The students even asked Tracy for her autograph!

Former Deputy Secretary's Regional Representative Tracy Young (center, back) with JoLisa Hoover (back, right) and her fourth-grade class.

The secretary's regional representative is the eyes and ears of the secretary regarding what is going on in schools and districts of



COLLABORATION AMONG THE FELLOWS

James Liou (Boston, Mass.)

I don't know if I could have anticipated it, but my fellowship work has been taking form in some concrete ways. I've really benefitted from the other fellows in talking through ideas of teacher professional development and thoughts of creating some kind of working rela-

tionship between our teachers' unions and ED. I'm starting to get ideas together for our fellowship program's mid-year report with the helpful advice of many other fellows and ED staffers. I've also been collaborating with another fellow to put together a preliminary forum of

teachers from my region through our local secretary's regional representative. Our intention is to build a collective of teachers who will begin to work and strategize around our core mission of connecting teacher voices to education policy.

Teaching Ambassador Fellowship: Representing Teachers to ED and ED to Teachers

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legacy of achievement and resiliency which, when coupled with their sense of loyalty, has provided the country with many examples of heroism and accomplishment, especially in the military arena. The rich cultural heritage of Latinos and their strong faith encourage optimistic and appreciative attitudes. When this is coupled with their respect for education and the honor to be found in hard work, Latinos should be recognized as a force that could turn around our economy. The education system would do well to recognize that the bilingual competencies, multicultural perspectives, and transnational connections that Latinos bring to the classroom are assets upon which we should build, rather than deficits.

Consequences of Continuing to Ignore the “Elefante”

If we do nothing and continue to ignore the “elefante” in our classrooms, we will be putting our national security at risk—an educated citizenry is a basic tenet of any democracy. We will also be putting our economic future at further risk, especially in an era of globalization, where a highly skilled, multilingual, culturally aware workforce is essential if we wish to improve our economic status in the world.

Considering that we are entering a new era in education, an era when the possibilities for reform give many hope, we must examine past efforts at reform and learn from them so as not to repeat their failures. We must remember that our job is to educate Latinos, not to “fix” them or their language. We must remember that past efforts to focus on English language acquisition at the expense of developing students’ home language have only led to a failure to educate Latino students. We must remember that a culturally and linguistically relevant education is essential if we wish students to be academically successful. We must remember that equal access to an excellent education is a civil right.

For more information on this topic, visit:

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/>

University of Denver Latino Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship, <http://www.du.edu/>

National Center for Educational Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/>

Pew Hispanic Center, Statistical Portrait of Hispanic Population in the U.S., <http://www.pewhispanic.org>

EdTrust, <http://www2.edtrust.org/>

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, www.chci.org/