

“You can’t stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.”

— Winnie the Pooh

Educate Maine understands the wisdom of Pooh, evidenced by the numerous opportunities they have provided for me to leave my “corner of the Forest.” Their support has allowed me to work with educators throughout the country to share best teaching practices and discuss current issues in education. Despite the differences in locations and student populations, my colleagues and I have discovered a common challenge: meeting the increased social-emotional/mental health needs of our students. In fact, for many of us, this is a key element in our TOY platforms.

One of my favorite components of the MTOY experience has been deepening my understanding of education policy and sharing the teacher perspective on proposed legislation with local, state, and national policymakers. I’m pleased to report that no matter what level of government or party affiliation, legislators have made time to talk with me and have been eager to hear from classroom teachers on education issues. On the state level, six County Teachers of the Year and I met with the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Additionally, I have met with Reps. Longstaff and Austin, and very briefly with Speaker of the House, Sara Gideon, and Senate President, Mike Thibodeau.

In April, during “Washington Week,” I was excited to meet with Senator King and his Legislative Assistant, Sanjay Kane, as well as Senator Collins and her Legislative Assistant, Katie Brown. In talking with them, I shared my concerns about the proposed cuts in the federal education budget, emphasizing the need for funding for Early Childhood Education, as well as funding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grants Program, and concerns about school choice and what that means for rural communities. I also updated them on the 2016 CTOY platform: Connecting Classrooms to Communities and our efforts to highlight the excellent work happening in classrooms throughout Maine. My time at the White House was extraordinary. Standing in the Oval Office with the other STOYs and the President and First Lady is a memory that will stay with me forever.

Most recently, I had the opportunity to meet with the Maine State Board of Education and share my TOY Platform with them: **Closing the Achievement Gap**, which is built on three components: (1) Early Childhood Education (2) An accomplished educator for every child (emphasizing National Board Certification), and (3) social-emotional competencies.

Leaving “my corner of the Forest” has taken me out of my comfort zone. But, as Katherine Bassett, NNSTOY CEO says, “if you are comfortable, you are not growing.” Thanks to the support and encouragement of Educate Maine, I’m wicked uncomfortable and growing by leaps and bounds! The next foray out of the forest: Education Commission of the States’ National Forum on Education Policy in San Diego, followed by Space Camp in Alabama!