



Lessons Learned as 2012 RI T.o.Y

10. “Bucket Lists” should always be works in progress

Until winning this award, I would never have imagined putting some of the things I have done this year on my bucket list such as meeting the President at the White House or zip-lining backwards into a lake at Space Camp. I am the daughter of a carpenter from Coventry, RI; my life has been pretty simple and the limelight is not something to which I normally aspire, but WOW what a year professionally!

9. Meeting a childhood hero at breakfast is pretty cool

This summer, one of the keynote speakers at the Education Commission of the States National Conference in Atlanta was retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. As a kid, I knew little of left and right politics, but knew that it was pretty neat that a woman was appointed to the highest court in the land. Getting to tell her the impact she had on me as a child was pretty neat. She is feisty and a hoot to boot!

8. “Deployed parachutes are a beautiful thing”

This nugget of wisdom was offered to me in person at Space Camp by Apollo 16 Commander, Charlie Duke, one of just ten men alive today who once walked on the moon. As teachers, we embark each school year on long, sometimes crazy-sounding journeys. We spend the summer thankful to have seen the parachutes open and our kids move on. The nerves and tension of blast off should remind us that we once again set out to take our own giant leaps for mankind through teaching.

7. Being a lobbyist is a weird job

Part of my job as RI ToY has included traveling around the state and country, often engaging the press and the community in the process, speaking about the important work teachers do. In Washington, I took a very literal role of lobbyist in bringing a teacher’s message to President Obama, Dr. Biden, Secretary Duncan, and Senator Reed and worked at the U.S. Dept. of Education on Project Respect- a movement to elevate teachers and the profession. In Atlanta, Bill Gates took notes as teachers described concerns over evaluation systems which privilege test scores over all other measures of our effectiveness in the classroom.

6. Parent groups can help teachers in our work

In May, I delivered a keynote address to the annual RI PTA conference. They were receptive to my presentation, which featured what teachers would pack in parents’ backpacks to support our work.

5. It is not easy being a teacher nowadays

The RI chapter of the ASCD does some great work to nurture new and training teachers. Working with this organization has given me a clear sense that young teachers know they are entering the profession during a challenging time. It has been a strange time to be honored for service at a time when mass firings and loss of our pensions are a grim reality.

4. Teachers across our great country and the globe are passionate and patriotic people

The group of state teachers of the year for 2012 includes some pretty spectacular people. Every grade-level and content area is well represented in the group. Add to this meeting national teachers of the year from all over the globe while at Space Camp and I have been confirmed in some universal truths about teachers, not the least of which is that we are primarily motivated to teach as an act of patriotism, a desire to make a difference, a willingness to love children who are not our own as if they were.

3. Bill Gates loves PLCs right now

Follow the money! Bill Gates is planning to donate millions to support professional learning communities and the implementation of teacher evaluation systems across the nation.

2. Fingerprints go two ways when shaking hands-even with a President

I did my best to bring an honest message to our Commander-in-Chief on behalf of RI teachers. I felt tremendously humbled to do so.

1. Rhode Island is a pretty special place to work

The rest of the country has nothing on us! I have heard stories from teachers in every state and socio-economic setting. We have our challenges and shortcomings, but the educators in this state rock! It has been my HONOR to represent us. THANK YOU!