

Accepting the SETDA Student Voices Award

By Joan Cavallo

Principal of St. Albans City School

ST. ALBANS CITY- “It was beyond all expectations” Peter Drescher, Vermont’s State Educational Technology Director texted as students from St. Albans City School boarded the plane to return to Vermont, and it was. Nov. 4 through 6 a team of nine attended the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) Leadership Summit and Education Forum so that six students could share the story of our school with over 200 attendees. The students were introduced by Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education, and presented to a warm and welcoming room, ending with a standing ovation.

The event began with an evening reception where vendors shared their offerings and people gathered for finger food and conversation. Peter Drescher introduced the six students; Molly Clark, Chloe Wienstein, Charlie Levine, Marie Desorgher, Nicolas Boozan and Gabriella Jordan to the vendors and other members of SETDA. Students got to try technology offerings and talk with people that asked them questions and made them feel very important. As they went from vendor to vendor they also got to take swag that was all linked in some way to technology. It was fun and set the stage for the big presentation the next day. The big event started with each student having a microphone attached to their shirt. The next step was to present with the microphone to test the system. Students did a dry run of their presentation while microphone issues were addressed. The room was large and impressive. As students rehearsed the room was being set for the luncheon presentation they would be doing. Once everything was set, Kathryn Toomajian from Senator Leahy’s office joined the students for lunch. Before the students were able to finish dessert, they were brought to meet with Betsy DeVos, who would provide the introduction to their section. After pictures with the secretary, they were taken to the stage where they sat through two introductory speeches, and then they were on. The six students had rehearsed their presentation many times. They knew their lines and truly knew their content. On a stage with over 200 adults watching, they did an amazing presentation. The audience clearly appreciated their preparation, they laughed at their jokes and funny lines, they

participated in the group activity (brain break), and they were clearly interested in the message and the students delivering it. This was the first time in 18 years that a student group was doing the presentation without the adults from their team. The students remained on stage after their 45 minute presentation and were joined by the adult team; Grace Borst, Ashley Levine, Peter Drescher and Joan Cavallo. Together we answered questions from the audience.

With the big presentation behind us, it was time to see Washington D.C.. The group headed into the city on the Metro and went to the Museum of Natural History. There they split up into smaller groups so that everyone had a chance to spend time in the areas of most interest to them; gems, mummies, mammals, etc.. After the museum it was time to go out to dinner and get the dessert that the students did not get to enjoy at lunch.

On the final morning the group returned to the conference for breakfast and a lego challenge. After that it was off to the capitol again for a tour. It was pouring rain on election day, and with our flight early in the afternoon, students were eager to get to the airport, have lunch and get home. As Molly put it, “I can’t wait to see my mom and tell her everything that happened, I’ll be talking the whole ride home.”



Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education introduces the St. Albans City School students.

Courtesy of St. Albans City School



Kathryn Toomajian from Senator Leahy's office, enjoys lunch with the St. Albans City School team

before the presentation.



Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education poses with the St. Albans City School students.



St. Albans City School students Charlie and Nick look at the Mammals section of the Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C..