



*A Union of Professionals*

## International Summit on the Teaching Profession

April 22-24, 2024



From April 22 to April 24, the AFT participated in the International Summit on the Teaching Profession, which took place this year in Singapore and was hosted by the Singapore Teachers' Union.

The AFT did not send any delegates but sent both Rob Weil from the Educational Issues Department and John Lindenau from the International Affairs Department as observers. They were joined by representatives from the National Education Association, including Princess Moss, and representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, who were led by Deputy Secretary Cindy Marten.

This ISTP took place over three days, instead of the normal two, and featured heavy representation and intervention from the Singapore government and the Singapore Teachers' Union, alongside the usual presence of Andreas Schleicher from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Anthony Mackay as the moderator, and David Edwards and Susan Hopgood from Education International, as well as Larry Flanagan replacing John Bangs in his former role as EI spokesman. These sessions offered both education ministers and trade unionists from around the world a forum to present their successes and struggles, and an opportunity to listen to lessons learned from the vast experience showcased in the conference hall. Delegations also had the opportunity to go on three school visits prior to each day's sessions beginning, with the goal that the following discussions would include insights gleaned from the schools and the Singapore experience.

### United States Representatives

#### **Cindy Marten**

Deputy Secretary, Department of Education

#### **Jennifer Hong**

U.S. Department of Education

#### **Rob Weil**

AFT Educational Issues

#### **John Lindenau**

AFT International Affairs

#### **Princess Moss**

NEA Vice President

#### **Daaiyah Bilal-Threats**

NEA Education Policy and Practice



## Day 1: Future of Learning and Implications for Teaching

The first school that we visited was the School of Science and Technology, Singapore. SST is a secondary school focusing on bolstering the technological capacity of its students and is the first school in Singapore to include applied subjects such as biotechnology, computing+, design studies, electronics and engineering+. One focus of our visit was SST Inc. SST Inc. is a club that incorporates a large percentage of the student body and that stylizes itself as a business. The students pitch and design various products, which can then get used

either around the school or in partnership with outside organizations. Two examples were an app that collects school announcements in one place and an app that allows for caregivers to input symptoms of a sick child and receive medication suggestions.



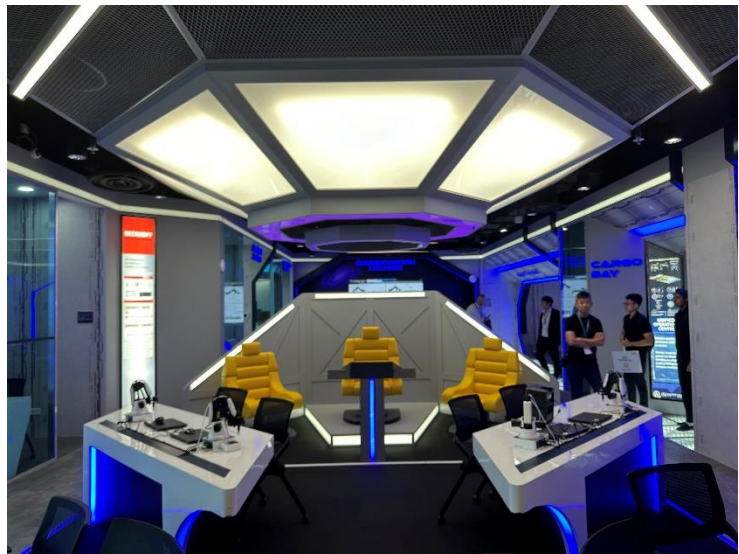
The first day of the summit saw a focus on two main topics: PISA scores and what many countries referred to as a “new era” of education. There was a concern among almost every minister present that PISA scores had been dropping randomly, due in no small part to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. One solution offered to this conundrum was to reinforce basic education, allowing students to master the basics so that they’re prepared for the future of work and the new technologies inherent in that future. Schleicher, however, pushed back against this notion and against the focus on PISA scores. It was his belief that the overfocusing on PISA scores had led to a “lost generation” of students who were frustrated with the overemphasis on testing and learning to the tests. His solution was not to reinforce basic education, but to create a system that caters to the needs and interests of the students, helping them become well-rounded citizens able to grapple with the changing nature of the world more effectively.



## Day 2: Role of Technology in Transforming Education and Vocational Training

The second school visit was to the Institute of Technical Education East. ITE East is a postsecondary school that focuses on preparing students for the vocational careers of tomorrow, preparing them with supremely well-funded laboratories and partnerships with local industries to provide them with a co-op like experience. A highlight of this school visit included one of its robotics labs, stylized to resemble the USS Enterprise. This lab served as a showcase for the students' education in robotics, telecommunications and hydroponics. The truly impressive aspect of the lab, however, was not the projects within, but the state-of-the-art nature of it. This was clearly a place where visitors would be brought in to see the extent of the resources available to ITE East, a fact that was not lost on the delegation.

On day two of the summit, the focus was on the reality of artificial intelligence and AI tools in the classroom. This marks a departure from the previous thoughts of "how we regulate AI" to "now that AI is here, what can we do to make sure it works for us?" Almost every minister and trade unionist was aligned in the acknowledgement that AI tools can be a benefit to the teaching profession, but how that benefit manifests was under debate. Schleicher was of the opinion that AI is a neutral tool, one that can unify us or one that can shove us into silos. This assertion was met



with disagreement among the collected parties, who mostly viewed AI technology as containing the inherent biases of its creators and testers. There was one unifying cry that did come out of this session, and that was that teachers must have continuous professional development and education in how to best utilize these tools. There have been so many "life-changing" tools that have come into classrooms over the years that have never been truly utilized because the people using the tools have never truly been trained on how best to use them. If AI is to avoid the same fate, and if governments truly want their education systems to benefit from AI, then governments must invest in continuous professional development to ensure that the people on the frontlines of education are actually prepared for the future.

***“A high-quality public education can build much-needed skills and knowledge. It can stabilize communities and democracies. It can strengthen economies. It can combat the kind of fear and despair that evolves into hatred.”***

***–AFT President Randi Weingarten***

## Day 3: Partnerships to Support Learning for Life

The third school visit was to Changkat Changi Secondary School, a school that focuses on aerospace. The school is well connected to the local aerospace industry, with several teachers and administrators being former industry members. This pipeline has afforded the school a partnership with Lycee Saint-Exupery in Toulouse, France. Changkat Changi is a STEM school, and while the school offers the basic, foundational courses, if a student wants to move to a school specializing in another area, that process is long and opaque, a fact brought up by El Iza Mohamedou, head of the OECD Center for Skills, who was present on the excursion. While the school has ample resources (we were shown a classroom where every student had access to a drone and was using it to learn how to code), the flexibility for students placed into the program is almost nonexistent. This school was a prime example of the pluses (superb funding, excellent teacher-to-student ratios) and the minuses (rigidity, lack of options) that the Singapore education system features.

The final session of the summit was the most back-and-forth of the three, with conversations about the different partnerships in education. On one hand, several ministers and labor leaders from various countries keyed in on partnerships that help schools become the centers of their communities. This means building relationships with parents and the local government to turn schools into bastions of the community where students can grow as people and receive other services such as healthcare, and where parents feel like they're not simply customers seeking out a service. On the other hand, both Schleicher and Mackay focused on partnerships with technology companies. The thought was that some of these companies are altruistic entities that schools need to work with if they want to be future ready and if they want to provide quality education for their students.

## ISTP 2024 Commitments

This year's commitments focused on improving, updating and renovating last year's commitments. The 2024 ISTP commitments follow below.

- 1. Enhance Student Well-Being and Academic Outcomes:** Expand our purposeful collaboration by deepening our engagement across all educational levels, involving education-focused organizations, private educational partners, business and industry, and relevant government agencies.
- 2. Support and Value Educators:** Concentrating on improving support for educators by fostering collaborative environments, respecting their professional autonomy, enhancing recruitment processes, ensuring sustainable work conditions and diversifying the workforce.
- 3. Transform Schools into Community Centers:** Cultivating schools into diverse and inclusive environments. These centers will foster growth and development for students, families, community members, educators and leaders through active and meaningful collaboration.
- 4. Reconceptualize Career Pathways:** Revamping educational structures to provide high-quality career pathways for students and adults alike, through the expansion of strategic partnerships that equip them with essential skills for a rapidly changing and unpredictable global landscape.
- 5. Embrace Future Learning Technologies:** Engaging with emerging technologies to advance learning and teaching for both students and educators. By leveraging their knowledge and experiences, we plan to create more efficient and effective educational tools, while carefully navigating the challenges and opportunities these technologies present.

