

NCCEP Youth Leadership Summit

The 2022 Youth Leadership Summit (YLS) hosted 150 students from across the country in Washington D.C. from July 17-20th during the NCCEP/GEAR UP Annual Conference. Students participated in a 3.5-day leadership training where they developed lifelong friendships with peers from various programs, as well as program staff and trainers.

The final day of the program culminated in a presentation by YLS students in front of over 2,000 conference attendees on topics they are passionate about, including education reform, postsecondary education access and affordability, environmental sustainability, gun violence, mental health, inclusion, and economic justice, among others. Four GEAR UP TN students from Meigs County High School, Polk County High School, and Livingston Academy were selected to attend the conference. We sat down with them to ask a few questions about their experience.

Q: In one word, describe your experience at Youth Leadership Summit.

A: Terrific, Inspiring, Encouraging, Empowering

Q: On your way here, what were your expectations?

A: I thought it was going to be boring—like a school day—where you just sit in a room and listen to people talk.

A: I expected a big round table everyone sat around with a very important person at the end.

Q: It's a leadership conference, so what do you think you'll take back from this that will help you with your leadership skills?

A: I learned how many different backgrounds come into play and even when you don't know someone's story, that really affects them, and you need to listen to other people and use empathy.

A: I learned you need to talk to everybody—not just the people who talk a lot—because everybody has a really good personality when you get to know them, they'll open up to you.

Q: Has this conference helped you to become a better leader?

A: Yes (x4)

Q: What was your favorite part?

A: I think just meeting the people that are from all over the place. You don't know somebody from this place, but you think, wow, that person is really good to meet.

A: I think my favorite part was watching in my group for the presentations, the people who spoke at the end, a couple of them said they didn't want to talk on that stage. I think it was just the entire group encouraging them to get up there, even though they didn't want to at all.

Q: That had to be terrifying. What were your thoughts on having to get up there in front of everybody?

A: I had a bunch of people keep coming up to me and being like oh you should do this. I read your little speech that you wrote, and I really think you should do it. At first, I just wanted to stand in the back, but I'm really glad they pushed me to do it.

A: I was very nervous, everybody in my group was, and we all did it together and that's what kind of relieved us and made it more natural and not just laughing out there. Everybody did it together.

Q: What did you learn about you? The you before you got here and you now that you're leaving?

A: I've always been awkward and shy, but I said nobody knows anybody here, I'm going to talk to new people. It was not awkward, I was not shy, and you've just got to do it.

A: I think for me it was meeting people of different cultures. I'm from a small county and we have 450 students in the school and it's not that diverse, so just getting to meet people of other cultures, I really liked that.

