

Educators participate in Cato's 2021 Sphere Summit

A Well-Rounded Education

Across two four-day sessions in June and July, Cato hosted teachers from grades 5 through 12 for the Institute's first resumption of in-person events. At the Sphere Summit, Cato scholars and outside experts provided professional development to educators on policy issues and civics. This year organizers developed a new hybrid capacity, allowing participants to attend either in person or online.

"The Sphere Summit aims to restore a spirit of civil, constructive, and respectful discourse and engagement and to return facts, analysis, and research to primacy as the vehicles for discussion and debate," explains Allan Carey, director of Sphere Education Initiatives. "Our 2021 summits were by far the most successful to date, bringing together hundreds of educators from across the country, in person and virtually, to advance this mission. It was extremely gratifying to hear them describe this as the best professional development experience they've ever attended, and, for so many of them, to walk away self-identifying as libertarian."

Among the featured speakers were three members of Congress. Rep. Lou Correa (D-CA), Rep. Peter Meijer (R-MI), and Rep. Young Kim (R-CA) addressed both particular policy issues and ways to reach across the aisle and find common ground in our deeply divided, hyperpartisan era.

In addition to the lineup of experts from Cato and other libertarian organizations, Sphere also includes representatives from other think tanks and organizations across the ideological spectrum, including the Center for American Progress, the Heritage Foundation, and the Brookings Institution. Together, they sought to model ways to engage in productive, civil dialogue between people with different political and ideological perspectives.



Top: Senior fellow **Jason Kuznicki** leads a conversation with **Irshad Manji**, educator and author of numerous works on reformist interpretations of Islam as well as racial and religious identity, including her latest book, *Don't Label Me: An Incredible Conversation for Divided Times*. Center: Attendees at dinner during remarks by **Peter Goettler**, president and CEO of the Cato Institute. Bottom: **Jeff Vanderslice**, director of government and external affairs, interviews **Rep. Peter Meijer** (R-MI).



1. **Yascha Mounk**, contributing editor at *The Atlantic*. 2. **Irshad Manji** leads a panel with teachers **Ben Baar** and **Candi Tucker**. 3. **Jane Coaston**, host of “The Argument” podcast for the *New York Times*. 4. **Rep. Young Kim** (R-CA) and **Rep. Lou Correa** (D-CA) participate in a joint interview on reaching across partisan divides. 5. Teachers **DeJuan Parker** and **Staci Garber**.

Attendees were impressed with the quality of the event and the valuable insights and information they will be able to apply in their classrooms going forward. “First and foremost, the Sphere Summit was a great opportunity for me, and I am beyond excited to incorporate the useful strategies, information, etc. in my own classroom and with colleagues,” said Shameka Watts, a middle school social studies teacher from Georgia.

“The professionalism and hospitality were beyond what I expected,” said Jennifer

Romer, a K–12 social studies coordinator from Alaska, explaining that “the plethora of resources and books will be beneficial to bring back to teachers in my district.” Scott Yamanashi, an AP teacher in North Carolina, observed that “as a civics junkie and teacher, there are not enough words to express the breadth of what I learned and will take back to the classroom,” particularly citing the material on debate-centered instruction and immigration policy. “It will be an experience I never forget and am happy

to continue forward!”

Thanks to the generous support of Sponsors, Cato was able to offer scholarships to participants, which covered travel costs and provided room and board for in-person attendees. Going forward, the Sphere Initiative will continue to host professional development seminars for educators at its Sphere Summits and produce materials and video content that teachers can use to further Sphere’s mission of “teaching civic culture together.” ■