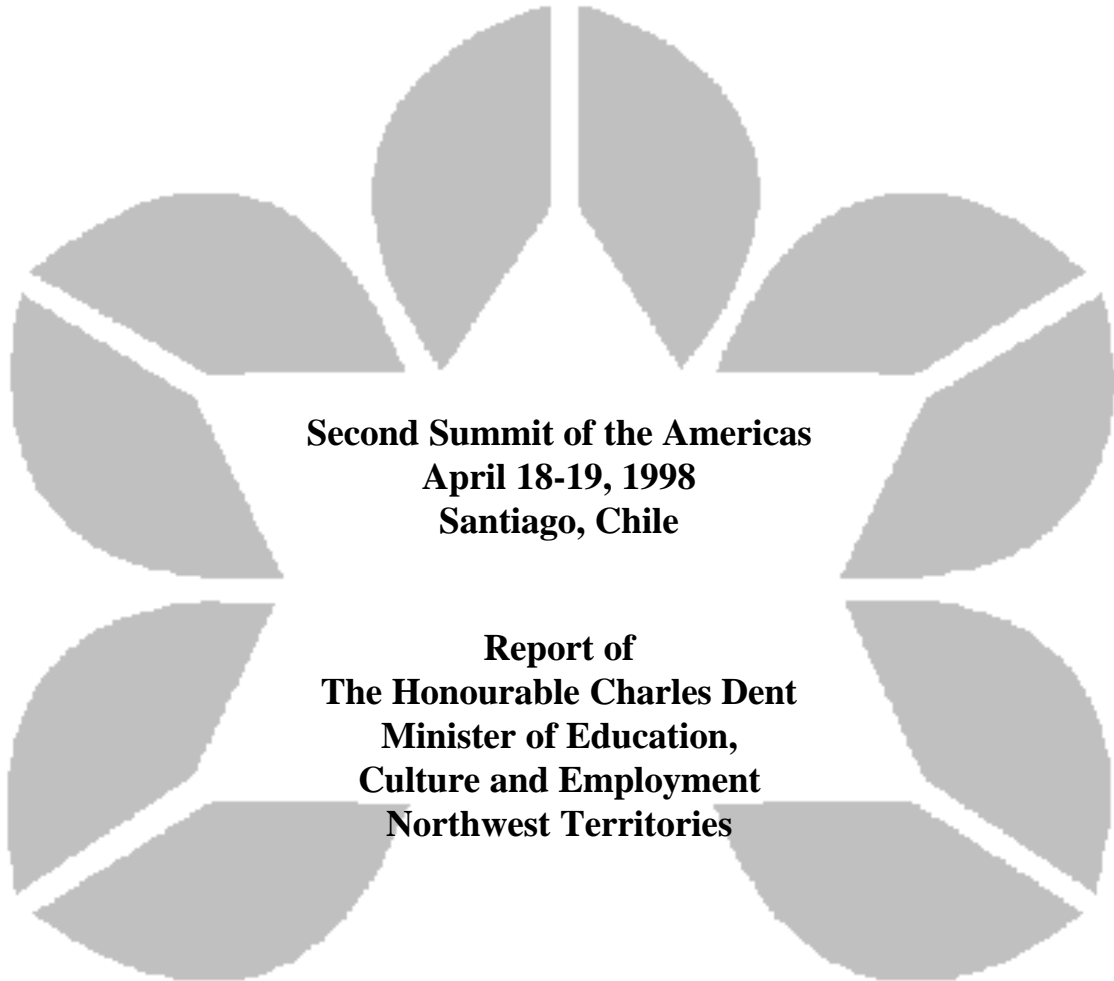


# **Council of Ministers of Education, Canada**



**Second Summit of the Americas  
April 18-19, 1998  
Santiago, Chile**

**Report of  
The Honourable Charles Dent  
Minister of Education,  
Culture and Employment  
Northwest Territories**

**Summit of the Americas**  
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*Attended by the Hon. Charles Dent*  
*Minister of Education, Culture and Employment*  
*Government of the Northwest Territories*

The Conference began Saturday morning with opening speeches by Chile's President Frei and USA President Clinton. Both worked references to the importance of education into their remarks, tying economic development to an educated population. Mr. Clinton also referred to the role an educated public plays in developing and maintaining democracies.

Following the two opening speeches, the Conference working sessions began. The first topic for discussion was education. For this session I was seated behind the Prime Minister. I offered him a few points to include in his comments.

Most leaders who spoke during the session on education emphasised its importance, and tied education to free trade. As the Prime Minister from Trinidad and Tobago put it, economic development only happens when people develop. He went on to say that free trade is of no benefit if a country has nothing to export, suggesting that it takes an educated populace to develop the products and services to export.

Many leaders talked about ranking the development of distance education as a high priority for their countries, as the delivery method with the best chance of reaching the most people. Several suggested that there should be a hemispheric approach to developing methods for distance education, as well as for curriculum and standards.

The US President spoke about the need for all countries to invest heavily in education in order to see significant change. He also challenged the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to double - to \$300 million – the money they make available for education-related projects.

In his intervention during the Education session, our Prime Minister tied advanced technology to further education and suggested Canada has much to offer in terms of systems that have demonstrated success and people skilled in setting them up and training others to operate them. He made note of the fact that one of Canada's Ministers of Education was part of the Canadian team in Chile

Mr. Chretien talked about how practised Canadian jurisdictions are in using distance education, and our experience working in multi-lingual, multi-ethnic settings, referring in particular to Leo Ussak school in Rankin Inlet. He also talked about why exchanges for teachers and students work to everyone's benefit, and how Canada was supporting the goals of the Action Plan through scholarships and exchanges. He also announced a significant expansion of Net Corps, a youth internship program in Latin America and the Caribbean.

When the working session moved to the next topic, I went to a press conference for the Canadian Press Corps. Darren Schemmer (DFAIT), Ethel Thayer (OIP-School Net) and I spoke, and one of the pilot Net Corps participants was with us, prepared for questions. There was surprisingly little interest shown by the press. It turned out they had just discovered that CNN had scooped all the Canadian press with the story on Prime Minister Chretien's visit to Cuba, so education issues were not at the top of their concerns.

Following the press conference, there was a luncheon for all Ministers. I was seated with several Education Ministers (Columbia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Argentina, Panama) and the US Secretary of Education. The discussion was wide-ranging, covering topics from distance education to decentralised decision-making. It was obvious from the discussion that Canada is regarded very highly, and many countries hope to take advantage of our experience and expertise.

An afternoon session for Ministers of Education had been scheduled for 4 - 6 p.m., but it did not get started until more than 45 minutes late. I believe that all North & South American countries were represented at the table, but only two Caribbean Ministers were present (apparently a result of the cost of attending along with the late notice that education would be of such importance during the Summit).

All those who spoke made a point of stressing the importance that Ministers of Education were meeting. Many talked about the need to work together to advance and reform the education systems in the hemisphere, with some even advancing the proposal we work on hemispheric standards.

Jamaica's Minister suggested that the relationship between national and hemispheric standards and curriculum needed to be better defined before too much work was done on hemispheric plans. Nicaragua and Peru said that plans must be based on what is really possible. The Nicaraguan leader noted that he didn't believe that his country could meet the "hemispheric goal" of having all children able to access primary education by 2010, as poverty in his country is too deep.

All Ministers, including the US Secretary, agreed that it was time to "put some meat on the bones" of the "Regional Co-operation Projects in Education for the Second Summit of the Americas"-Report of the Working Group to the Co-ordinators of the II Summit of the Americas (Action Plan). The Action Plan and table can be found immediately following this report.

There was general agreement that an agenda for the July 30 and 31 meeting of Education Ministers in Brasilia should be developed that would lead to a concrete plan for activities that could be undertaken to demonstrate quick progress on some of the items from the Action Plan, and set timelines for all projects listed. Most further agreed to try to develop a mechanism to follow up and report publicly on activities related to the Action Plan. While the US floated the idea that the Working Group which had done the work on the Action Plan to date continue to lead the process, all the other countries felt there had to be a Ministerial committee to lead the process. It was proposed that the Ministerial committee be made up of representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, USA,

Caribbean (2 countries), and Canada. With Canada hosting the next Summit, it was quite strongly put that Canada had to be involved in all hemispheric education meetings.

I agreed to bring this request to CMEC for consideration, and promised a quick response. I did indicate that I thought we would be willing to participate. I talked to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) representative Darren Schemmer about the request that Canada participate, and he was receptive to the proposal (I told him that the cost of participation would have to be borne by DFAIT).

The first meeting of Ministers will take place some time in May in Washington, DC.

The person who seems to be co-ordinating the meeting, and who should be advised if we are going to participate is Maria Josefina Lira Bianchi, the Chief of International Relations in the Office of International Relations, Ministry of Education, Brazil.

The Barbados Minister noted that August 1 is a significant national day in many Caribbean countries, and requested that consideration be given to moving the dates for the meeting in Brasilia to some other time than July 30 and 31. The consensus appeared to support consideration of another date close to that time.

On Sunday morning the Ministers of Education again met, this time to hear presentations from several international agencies.

Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General of the OAS, wanted to see development of good statistics on results. Once a verifiable system of statistics was available, they could be used to advance the agenda for education. He expressed concern that there were too often no tangible results following meetings such as this one, and encouraged Ministers to get organised to ensure the agenda was moved along. He said the OAS was strongly committed to supporting the Action Plan, and encouraged Ministers to focus discussion on specific actions, rather than general discussion.

The Director General for Latin America of UNESCO talked about the need to develop quality indicators. She outlined the work done by UNESCO in developing a methodology for studies to ascertain education level performance and quality of teaching. UNESCO will continue to work on a programme of education reform with Latin American and Caribbean countries, tied to a programme promoting more local involvement and decision-making.

World Bank President James Wolfensohn outlined how the Bank had invested \$10 Million over the past 3 years, and planned to make \$20 Million available over the next three years. He talked about the need to see programmes in the 10 - 12 year range, rather than more narrowly-focused, short-term projects. Wolfensohn noted that national plans needed to be broad, running from prenatal and early intervention to ensure a better start for kids in education, right through primary, secondary, tertiary and job training. He talked about the need to get banks and Ministers of Education speaking on the same terms, and the need to define the involvement of the private sector and civil society (NGO's).

Wolfensohn suggested that all countries should develop these broad strategic plans for up to the year 2010, showing goals and methodology for assessing performance. He also noted that the World Bank has made learning and education loans of up to \$5 Million more accessible, by ensuring approvals take less than 60 days.

The President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Enrique Iglesias cautioned Ministers to follow plans designed in their own countries, reflecting their national needs, rather than setting up programmes to appeal to banks or the OAS.

He noted that the IDB is prepared to devote 50% of its resources to social programmes, mostly in education, and particularly focused on the primary level. The Bank would like to see the education agenda for the region shortened, and Ministers move ahead with projects that will demonstrate results.

Iglesias outlined three initiatives the bank is prepared to assist with financing:

- student/teacher exchange programmes to encourage the dissemination of best practises;
- new programmes to develop schools of excellence (perhaps virtual schools) concentrating on math, science and new technology; and,
- distance education programmes.

Iglesias indicated that the bank will propose a plan to finance these new initiatives at the Brazil meeting.

Jose Antonio Ocampo, Secretary General of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) also talked briefly about his organisation's involvement in education, and the meeting planned for July in Brazil.

The meeting wrapped up shortly after these organisations made their comments. Closing comments were made by a couple of countries. The USA said again that Minister of Education meetings such as this one were very important, presenting opportunities for us all to learn from each other and discuss ways in which we could co-operate to share best practises. Barbados reminded us that the capacity to deal with paperwork in small jurisdictions is very limited, and it is time to move beyond doing studies and ensure action is taken on the agenda. Concern about the ability of some jurisdictions to repay loans taken out for educational projects was also expressed.

Brazil encouraged all countries to participate in the meetings at the end of July, and suggested that in the long run, there may be reason to broaden the scope of the meetings to include a number of other countries (Europe, etc.).