

My name is Natalie Fisher and I am honored to be nominated for the Chapter Teacher of the Year recognition from The Air and Space Forces Association (AFA). I began teaching in Miami, Florida in 1990 and have enjoyed many experiences at a variety of levels teaching children through a STEM lens.

Most people think of Engineering when STEM education is the topic. I teach math, the tools that drive all engineering accomplishments. Math may not be as sexy as engineering but without it, nothing happens. I work with sixth graders that are identified at the end of elementary school to have strong gifts and talents for mathematical thinking. Math Academy is a 6th grade double-acceleration track. Students learn all sixth, seventh, and eight grade state standards in one year. They move to Algebra 1 Honors for high school credit in 7th grade and take Geometry Honors for high school credit in 8th grade. This track affords them the opportunity to take advanced math, science, and engineering coursework during their high school years. Therefore, I consider it a linchpin in the foundational skills of any student that has to propensity for engaging in a STEM career as an adult.

My program is the only program in the county that offers the 100 minute (double period) option for double acceleration. Most schools require students to take 6th grade math during summer months and simply puts the student into 7th grade accelerated curriculum as a 6th grader. My belief is that students need the time to fully develop the foundational skills that 6th grade standards require before fully engaging in 7th and 8th grade level work. Conceptual knowledge can fully develop and computational skills as well as critical thinking strategies are fully fleshed out in this program. Great thinkers pursue and are successful in STEM fields. To that end, I work diligently at developing students' abilities to communicate, articulate thought processes, and be able to mathematically justify their work as well. We work almost exclusively in cooperative groupings, giving students opportunities to communicate verbally and in writing as a team, solving problems at application levels rather than focusing on low level practice using worksheets, etc. Technology is incorporated as much as possible to give students tools to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, address weaknesses with individually tailored lessons or extend their learning past what the class as a whole may be doing at that time. This use of technology builds each students' ability up to greater serve their group when they come together to work on real world tasks. Historically, 90% or more of my students score Level 5 on their end of the year state standards and many leave middle school bound for STEM magnet programs in high school.

I also serve as a math mentor to interns and new teachers to our staff. I offer many math trainings to our faculty and have made videos used by the district for continued professional development. I serve as the 6th grade team leader which gives me the opportunity to organize a NASA trip to Kennedy Space Center each year for all 6th grade students. What better way to inspire STEM interest than to expose students to the possibilities that are so close to their own back door! I have assisted in organizing STEM activity days for our school, which are great fun and give students another opportunity to explore STEM futures.

John Glenn Top Gun Academy is a Stewart Middle Magnet honors club that supports the development of young men and women interested in space, aviation, and aeronautic careers. They meet monthly and take an annual trip to the Space Coast of Florida to explore all sorts of historical and current interests within the space community. I am a sponsor for this club and work each year to recruit new candidates and help plan events sponsored by the club. These students serve in leadership capacities within our school, often touring new students or VIP visitors and hosting school events. This year the club is anxiously waiting to meet Astronaut Nicole Scott in her upcoming visit in March. Many of our John Glenn graduates have careers at NASA and graciously offer support to the current members of the club as mentors, guest speakers, etc.

I look forward to at least one more decade of math instruction before retiring. I hope to influence many more young minds toward a future in a STEM field. The solution to our current condition lies within the walls of today's schools. I hope to be an active part of that solution by inspiring young minds to reach for the stars and know they can be the difference!