



Mission Control during students' simulated space flight



Andy in his Young Astronauts gear



G-Force One at Cape Canaveral

## One Small Zero-G Flight for Man...

Andy Pearce, Columbus Magnet Elementary School – Norwalk, CT

I have seen science taught in ways that can be rather uninspiring. After all, seeing charts describing parabolic curves, for example, can be brain numbing for many kids. But, I thought, what if I could relate the physics of parabolic curves to the romance of space travel and the wonder of weightlessness? It would make a seemingly arcane topic come alive and possibly spur interest in other areas of science. My own passion for space history and space technology popped into my head and I realized I had the perfect idea for a Fund for Teachers fellowship – one that combined my interest with something that could practically guarantee interest in younger people.

With my grant, I will participate in a zero-gravity workshop at Cape Canaveral to enhance current curriculum and inspire a new generation of students to embrace STEM principles. I told my students that I will do some of the very same training that astronauts do. Ever since I can remember I aspired to be

an astronaut – it was either that or play shortstop for the Mets and, well, since I couldn't hit the curve ball, that career option was not to be. In July, I will join other educators in a workshop centered around Newton's Laws, microgravity, parabolic flight, drop towers, suborbital and orbital flight, current scientific research in space and effects of space travel on humans. Then, after a Zero-G mission briefing, I'll board a specially-modified Boeing 727 in my own Zero-G flight suit for 15 parabolic arcs that create a weightless environment.

In May, every class at our school received a detailed lesson plan tailored to my mission. They conceived and design experiments that can then be brought on board for the Zero-G flight. This type of work (both my fellowship and their experiments) isn't out of the ordinary for many of the students at Columbus Magnet School. A Young Astronaut program is offered to any interested child in grades one through five. Every year, a group of fifth graders

simulate an astronaut mission. For eight months, these students become experts on the history, process, science and nuances of the space program. Hands-on learning, weekly experiments and history lessons, perpetual team-building, and even a rigorous physical training component run by a former Navy SEAL result in an indelible experience that in no small way parallels that of their NASA counterparts. It energizes the whole school and everyone becomes fascinated and energized about science, technology, engineering and math. This fellowship is serving this same purpose for me.

*Continued on page 6*

*In this issue, FFT Fellows share summer learning goals for year-round impact back in the classroom.*

## Mission in Motion

"Mark Twain lived during a tumultuous period of American history, through westward expansion, slavery, and the Civil War. By touring the sites where he lived and wrote, I developed a deeper understanding of how his childhood, travels, family and society influenced his writing."

- Leslie Schippert  
Edison Middle School – Los Angeles, CA

### Project Description

Researched Mark Twain's life and work in museums and historically-significant sites across the country to enhance literature units with historical context and personal insights.

### Fellowship Experiences

- Reviewed the Mark Twain Papers in the archives of the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library
- Attended the 58th Annual National Tom Sawyer Days and explored the eponymous cave in Hannibal, MO
- Entered a frog in the Jumping Frog Jubilee in Calaveras County, CA
- Visited Samuel Clemens' cabin in Sonora, CA, and summer home in Elmira, NY
- Rode the *Mark Twain Riverboat* down the Mississippi River past Jackson's Island
- Toured the Mark Twain House in Hartford, CT, where Clemens wrote *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*



Leslie painting Tom Sawyer's Fence in Hannibal, MO



Student actors prepare for play performance

### Classroom Impact

- Developed an Animoto and blog to give students a vicarious experience with Twain and his characters
- Produced and directed a student production of *Huckleberry Finn* for the school community
- Introduced unit on young adult Civil War fiction with related projects
- Developed an in-depth Mark Twain unit based on short stories, Clemens' autobiography and *Huckleberry Finn* that is integrated with Common Core standards for literature, writing and close reading

To keep the momentum going, donate at [fundforteachers.org](http://fundforteachers.org)



## From the Executive Director



Karen with Expeditionary Learning Fellows and staff

At Fund for Teachers we do a lot of thinking and talking about the legacy of learning and how to better support those who are leading the way. While other organizations *herald broad leaps* and *strategic shifts*, we actively choose to maintain a unilateral focus; to provide teachers with unparalleled professional development opportunities - those they design themselves. Expert teachers use a Fund for Teachers fellowship as a building block in the construction of meaningful and dynamic lessons for their students. Our patronage revolves around developing strategies to reach more of those teachers, providing support through the process of successfully writing a proposal to obtain the funding required to pursue their goal, helping them tell their stories, and always working to raise money to make more opportunities available.

I am continually inspired by the creativity and resourcefulness of the teachers who seek out Fund for Teachers' help. The dynamic effects on individual classrooms and entire schools resulting from the projects conceived and pursued by these teachers can be amazing. I applaud the insightful principals and faculty colleagues who not only support each other in this quest to be better, but choose to facilitate the process in order to make the most of every opportunity available. The progressive development and learning that takes place in these environments results in lasting differences in our students' lives.

Fund for Teachers, in communion with our supporters and patrons, laude the art and science of teaching. We celebrate the newest class of 483 Fellows as they embark this summer on the latest leg of their professional journeys.

Fund for Teachers is here for you and because of you. We wish to support teachers and patrons with practical resources. Be assured that you have positively influenced the future. How can we do better? Let me hear from you.

Wherever your learning may take you this summer, be safe, stay in touch.

Ever forward,

Karen K. Webb  
Executive Director

## Our Mission

Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of teachers by recognizing and supporting them as they identify and pursue opportunities around the globe that will have the greatest impact on their practice, the academic lives of their students and on their school communities.



2000 Post Oak Boulevard, Suite 100  
Houston, Texas 77056-4400  
713-296-6127 or 800-681-2667  
Fax 713-296-6134

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Family class students surround Nicol and her sign "I am going to learn Spanish in Colombia."

## *Building Community Via Colombia*

Nicol DeCarli, Hollin Meadows Elementary School – Alexandria, VA

Every step I've taken since leaving my legal career in 2006 has been about pursuing my passion. When I started teaching after five years as a big city corporate lawyer, I thought to myself, "At last, I've found my passion." After three years as a private school teacher, I began my tenure as an elementary ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher. I thought then, "Here is a job I love, to which I look forward to returning after vacations." Now, in my ninth year of teaching and taking on a new role also teaching adults, I'm finally honing in on the part of my job that is my passion: Raising the level of my students, both young and old.

I am the lead ESOL teacher at a Title I elementary school serving students from across the globe, with a majority of language learners coming from Latin American countries. I have worked with every grade level and currently work primarily with fourth and sixth grades. This year, I also began teaching a family literacy class in the evenings to parents with children at my school, covering basic English, literacy and parenting skills. All of my students have a range of English.

Language, however, is not their biggest challenge – building community

is. Students and their parents need to feel integrated in the greater school community to develop confidence and become leaders. The best way I can think of to guide that process is to become more linguistically- and culturally-literate in Spanish and Latin American culture, which I will do this summer in Colombia with my Fund for Teachers grant.

I am grateful and excited for this grant, as it will allow me to place myself in the exact position as my students when they arrive new to my school: total immersion. I will take Spanish classes daily and live with a Colombian family. I chose Colombia because I'm told that the people speak a grammatically-correct Spanish with a relatively neutral accent. Living with a local family, I will become familiar with the customs and rhythms of daily life and observe the interaction between parents and children. Navigating a new language and country, complete with its unique customs and culture, will stretch my limits daily (if not hourly!) I could not ask for a better exercise in growth and learning, personally and professionally.

With an increased ability to communicate and connect, I hope to be better able to build relationships and break down barriers with students and

their families. While I don't expect to return from Colombia speaking Spanish fluently, even a small daily greeting can make people feel welcome. I'd also like to create a video orientation for my school in English and Spanish. In my family literacy class, I will discuss PTA issues ahead of meetings so parents feel knowledgeable and prepared enough to attend. With a better understanding of Spanish, I can help them put their words into English so their voices can be heard. Beginning with these small steps, I hope to help my students, of *all* ages, feel more integrated into our school community so they can transform from being cultural survivors into connectors and leaders.

**Fund Facts:** *A lover of other languages and cultures, Nicol taught English in Japan prior to entering law school. In addition to being an FFT Fellow, she is also a Fulbright Hays recipient and an NEH scholar.*



Students build their own bridge with toothpicks



Fabricating a robot in the FabLab



The Old Shanghai Tea House



A view of modern Shanghai across the Huangpu River (photo: The Daily Mail)

## STEM: Made in China

Greg Kubisak and Jim David – STEM School Chattanooga

When we initially heard about Fund for Teachers, we thought it wasn't real. No one does this for teachers. But a colleague actually received a grant (making it real) and said her fellowship was the greatest thing she ever did. So we decided to spend the time applying for one of our own to research technological advancements in China. If we didn't get awarded, at least we'd learn a lot in the process of applying.

We got awarded.

Our proposal initially focused on an international robotics competition; but as our research deepened throughout the grant writing process, the competition morphed into merely a component of a multi-faceted STEM experience to bridge technology and culture, current capacity and new opportunities.

Our first stop will be Shanghai, a city of old and new connected, fittingly, by five bridges over the Huangpu River. Modes of transportation change from rickshaws on one side of the bridges to bullet trains on the other. We will research engineering issues surrounding transportation and document best

*... it's an experience that will bleed over into all we teach for years to come.*

practices for applying STEM solutions for a diverse population.

We'll also visit Shanghai's Fab Lab, the first in an international network of platforms pioneered by MIT for learning and innovation. We founded a Fab Lab at our high school, but the one in Shanghai operates on a college level. We want to collaborate and build a cohort that students can tap into as a global network for research and invention.

After Shanghai, we'll take the bullet train to Hefei for the 2015 RoboCup competition, visit an animation studio in Beijing and document historical engineering feats, such as the Great Wall of China, to broaden student awareness of STEM achievements and career opportunities.

We're equally as excited about returning to our students and applying what we learn. Going to a conference

gets you fired up in a way that can't be replicated. This fellowship is more than a conference – it's an *experience* that will bleed over into all we teach for years to come.

On the last day of school, students always ask, "What will you do this summer?" Our usual reply is, "Read a lot of books." But now, we'll be the ones creating a story to tell. When you know someone who actually accomplishes a feat (like our colleague and her FFT fellowship), that feat becomes real to you and can be a catalyst for greatness. We know this will happen with our students. As our horizons broaden, so will theirs.

**Fund Facts:** Greg has been an English teacher for the last four years, previously working at an outdoor, environmentally-focused charter high school. | Jim has received numerous education awards, including five building level teacher of the year awards, a regional teacher of the year award and a state level teacher of the year award in 2014.



Kelli (in red) celebrates her grant among students



Kelli adorned in Flamenco finery

## Her Own Flamenco Idaho

Kelli Brown, Idaho Arts Center – Nampa, ID

I began dancing when I was 16 and have taught dance at private and public schools for more than 25 years. Living my entire life in an agricultural-based state with little cultural diversity (94% Caucasian), I've had few opportunities to experience culture-based dance forms, until four years ago, when a local dance teacher who studied in Spain introduced me to Flamenco. Since then, my love of Flamenco has grown and my appreciation of the art form in a historical and cultural context has grown along with it. My fellowship will allow me to follow that teacher's lead and investigate the history and practice of Flamenco dance in Granada, Spain.

Flamenco is a Spanish form of dance originating from the South of Spain in the Andalusian region. It is thought to be more than 300 years old and has roots in folk music from Andalusia and the Romani people of Spain. My daily course work will consist of Spanish language instruction in the morning, with afternoons devoted to Flamenco dance technique/choreography and an hour of class focusing on the palo/

rhythm of each musical form. To study Flamenco in its place of origin creates authentic connections of dance to culture and history and gives me access to information not available anywhere else in the world.

Idaho is mostly rural and more than half of the land is managed publicly (either state or federal parks). Any opportunity to bring the arts to our kids is essential. Despite the state's homogeneous demographics, 22% of my school population and more than 25% of our community is Latino. The state's Hispanic Cultural Center is located within one mile of our campus. This culture is a large part of our community's identity and my learning will expand current instruction to acknowledge and honor it.

My high school dance students will begin the school year with a new elective choice – Culture in Dance. In addition to the Western forms of dance with its emphasis on technical skills and performance, students will now be exposed to Flamenco and its reliance on relationship and culture. First, they will complete a unit on Flamenco's

history, technique and musical theory; then conduct research on a cultural dance form from their heritage or area of interest to present in class. This project is designed to link students with their own history, culture and the role that dance can play in creating identity.

Dance is an ideal form of individual expression that provides a positive artistic outlet. At a time when young people are developing their identity, dance is a way for them to solidify their beliefs and explore who they are in concrete and abstract ways. My time spent in Spain will provide new avenues for me to guide them in their exploration and I can't wait to see where the learning takes all of us. Olé!

**Fund Facts :** *In addition to teaching dance at the Idaho Arts Charter School, Kelli is also an adjunct professor at Boise State University. She obtained her Master of Arts in Dance from California State University and has performed with groups including Off Center and Idaho Dance Theatre.*

Soweto students with a banner reading "Parents: Let us be one"

# OVERCOMING INEQUALITY WITH EDUCATION

Princeton Grayson, African-Centered Prep Elementary – Kansas City, MO  
Karis Parker, Spring Valley Elementary – Raytown, MO

We teach our scholars to be advocates and leaders. Every day we instill in them that the purpose of education is "to shift the paradigm." Over this past year, that paradigm included Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray and the list goes on.

We want our students to learn from the students in the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Burdened by The 1953 Bantu Education Act, Blacks were to be educated in a way that was "appropriate to their culture." This essentially meant preparing them for manual labor jobs. On June 16, 1976, students fought valiantly for change, despite the risks. We want to prepare and inspire our students to do the same.

During our Fund for Teachers fellowship, we will stay with a family in Soweto and, afterwards, continue on to Johannesburg researching Apartheid's lasting influence on education. The 2014 World Economic Forum ranked the overall quality of South African education 146th of 148. In Kansas City, our struggle is similar. According to last year's state testing in Kansas City Public Schools, over 70% of students scored

below grade level. Drawing parallels between the brave students in Soweto and our own will demonstrate their potential and fuel the passion needed to battle inequities we face.

Gandhi believed "knowledge gained through experience is far superior and many times more useful than bookish knowledge." Through our fellowship, we will bring experiential knowledge back to school with passion, focus and vigor. In addition to curricular updates and peer professional development, we will reinstate our schools' student councils so students will have the platform to further develop their leadership and advocacy skills. Communities need leaders from within, people who know the issues intimately. It is our ultimate goal to develop students' voices—voices that will one day take these students across a college stage to continue to impact our communities.

On a larger scale, we want students to understand their rights and to fight to ensure that they are duly respected. Hearing narratives about Soweto peers will inspire the realization that "people who look like me achieved powerful transformations and so can I." It is

imperative that our students recognize the immense greatness they possess and that the systemic issues that create obstacles will not hold them back.



Karis and Princeton celebrating their grant

**Fund Facts:** Outside of teaching, Karis is an active participant in various teacher/leader fellowships and a coach for **Girls on the Run**, an after-school program that encourages preteen girls to develop self-respect and healthy lifestyles through running. | Princeton is a member of the Catalyst Fund for Kansas City Public Schools, Leading Educators, American Federation of Teachers and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

# Creating a Special Education for Student Success

Vanessa Worrell, Sagewood Elementary – Casper, WY



Vanessa shares her good news with students.

Dysgraphia, dyslexia and other learning differences can cause great damage, not only to students' abilities to learn efficiently, but also to their social life and self-worth. If caught early in a child's education, however, effects of learning differences can be significantly mitigated. On my Fund for Teachers fellowship, I'm going to learn strategies to help my fourth and fifth grade special education students cope with and even *appreciate* their unique learning styles.

Under the direction of internationally-renowned learning disabilities expert Stephen G. Feiferin, I am among only 50 participants attending "The Neuropsychology of Learning Disabilities: Developing Interventions to Help Struggling Students" institute in Wellfleet, MA. We will receive intensive training to understand the neuroscience behind specific learning disorders and, then, learn evidence-based interventions. We'll also work with a group of professionals on a case study to apply all we learn. Armed with the latest brain-based research, I will be able to confidently navigate each student's strengths and weaknesses to develop targeted learning goals – no more haphazard experimenting with a hodgepodge of assessments, differentiated instruction or strategies that waste time and leave me wondering if I'm doing all I can.

I plan to also use my learning to show students their strengths and potential. These students have good ideas and great minds, yet they usually feel unsuccessful and unintelligent in the school setting. I want students' thinking to change from "I'm not smart" to "This is how my brain works and here are some ways I can overcome obstacles." The time frame for the institute is one week long, but the application of the skills learned will lead to a lifetime of facilitating students' happiness and success.

**Fund Facts:** Vanessa has been teaching elementary and middle school special education for more than 25 years, and is a Board Certified Teacher as an Exceptional Needs Specialist-Early Childhood through Adult.

## One Small Zero-G Flight for Man...

(Continued)

Teaching is more than pouring knowledge into students' heads; I think that part of the DNA of any teacher is a desire to share a passion. If I can, through my own close encounter with weightlessness, pass on the awe and wonder of science, and subsequently make it come alive for all children at my school, I can be on the forefront of inspiring them to adopt math and science for further study and even for a possible career. The fellowship focuses on science, but ideally, I would like to see kids embrace any kind of learning. I would be happy if kids developed a passion for languages, art, history, etc., as long as they nurture their potential into something meaningful for them.

**Fund Facts:** Along with his responsibilities as a fourth grade classroom teacher, Andy is the director of the school's Young Astronaut program, which infuses science, technology, engineering and math in its after-school curriculum. He was also chosen as the Wal-Mart Teacher of the Year for Norwalk, CT.

## Oh The Places They Go

Dr. Suess' perennial graduation gift *Oh The Places You'll Go* also epitomizes FFT Fellows' trajectory post-fellowship. Congratulations to these outstanding teachers:

- **Maggie Mabery** (Los Angeles 2013) named California Teacher of the Year
- **Pia deLeon** (Houston 2014) named Houston ISD Outstanding Asian Elementary Teacher of the Year
- **Cory Calloway** (Midland 2013) and Chris Hightower (Midland 2014) selected by students as Midland ISD "Shining Stars"
- **Megan O'Neill** (Alabama 2014) awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching
- **Margret Atkinson** (Louisiana 2011/2014) named the Patricia Behring Teacher of the Year by the National History Day organization
- **Franck Brichet** (Kansas City 2014) released a CD of French Language songs stemming from his fellowship
- **Patricia Greenleaf** (Houston 2011) named Alief ISD Secondary Teacher of the Year
- **Rodney Ward** (Massachusetts 2007) named Outstanding Earth Science Teacher by the National Association of Geoscience Teachers' New England Section
- **Catherine Cummins** (Louisiana 2013) selected as presenter at the National Science Teachers Association's Area Conference on Science Education





Fund for Teachers  
2000 Post Oak Boulevard, Suite 100  
Houston, Texas 77056-4400



# FFT 2015 BY THE NUMBERS

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**483** TEACHERS AWARDED

A horizontal row of 483 small, grey silhouettes of people in various professional poses, representing the teachers awarded.

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