

2006 HONOREE

## Melinda Kay Fitzgerald

R. D. and Euzelle P. Smith Middle School, Chapel Hill, NC  
Middle School Science Education • 8th Grade



**Years Teaching:** 10

**Average Class Size:** 27

**Classes Taught Per Day:** 4

**School's % of ESL Students:** 7%

**School Type:** Public, Suburban

**Type of Class:** Inclusion

“When it comes to academic success, I believe that building knowledge and skills is only part of the puzzle. I have seen students with the knowledge to pass a high-stakes test fail because they lack confidence or motivation. As I develop lessons that address science curriculum standards and integrate reading, writing, and math skills, I search for ways to raise self-esteem, motivate learning, and enhance critical thinking. To develop these assets, I focus on product-based learning in which students create products for authentic audiences. While teaching sixth grade, my students wrote, directed, and acted in famous missions in space exploration history. Using costumes, props, inflatable spacecraft, and a slideshow, they performed on stage for peers. Two years ago, I persuaded my principal to send me to bus driver training, so I could easily extend learning beyond the school grounds. My students call it our ‘Magic School Bus.’ We visit the local reservoir, water treatment plant, wastewater treatment plant, landfill, and power plant. Extending learning beyond the classroom walls empowers students and motivates them to perform at a higher level.”

“Because many of my students have not had science experiences that were unique and innovative, they come to me disliking science. My goal has been to challenge these traditional learning experiences by creating an environment



that is dynamic and enticing. There is a significant difference in learning about science and doing science. In my class, students do science. I want students to become scientists and develop a passion for asking questions and a thirst for understanding the unknown. My goal is to motivate students with once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that empower them to become agents of change and to explore sciences in high school and college and possibly as a career path.”

“Mrs. Fitzgerald is a creative, hard-working, and inspiring teacher who never fails to come up with new and imaginative methods for making science class interactive and exciting. Her students not only learn the required material, but also enjoy it, understand it, and are able to use it in their own lives and in the community. Mrs. Fitzgerald satisfies the needs and interests of all of her students, each of whom leaves the class with new skills and a new outlook on life.”

— former student

### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

Neil Pederson Chair in Technology (2004) • National Board Certification in Early Adolescence/Science (2000) • Bright Ideas Grants recipient (2004, 2005) • Steering committee member, Science Under the Sea: Philippe Cousteau Live from Aquarius Project (Summer 2005) • Coach, Students Fueling the Future (2004, 2005, 2006)