

2019 New Mexico Academy of Science Outstanding Science Teacher Awardee Amanda Pacheco-Suazo, Mission Academy Elementary School

Amanda Pacheco-Suazo is a kindergarten teacher at Mission Academy Elementary School, a STEAM magnet school in the Albuquerque Public School System. She has been teaching preK-2 for 9 years.

The Academy has never honored a kindergarten teacher before but Mrs. Amanda (as her students call her) is a unique kindergarten teacher. She teaches kindergarten in a high poverty area in Albuquerque. 100% of students qualify for free breakfast and free lunch. Mission Elementary is a title one school with many diverse learners, many English language learners and students from diverse economic and cultural background. The first year that Mission Elementary became a magnet school, she began a program she called “Master Scientist.” She fund-raised for materials on an education donation website and used those funds to purchase lab coats and fairy tale STEM problem solving kits for her students. Mrs. Pacheco-Suazo created an environment that encouraged unique learning, and a classroom that promoted creativity, independence and cooperative exploration of problems.

She cleverly used the lab coats to make her students feel like real scientists as they worked through problems in fairy tales – such as designing a house for the 3 Little Pigs or figuring out how to support a tall beanstalk. She utilized the school’s ipads, digital lab, and STEM lab to teach computer science. She introduced the concept of testing hypotheses. She piqued student interest in engineering with a marble chase and a legos project. She has taken her students on field trips to science-oriented destinations to learn about habitats. In late October of this year, she hosted visitors to her class from the “Magnet Schools of America” national meeting.

The bottom line is: Her students enjoy science. They have learned how to ask questions, imagine and plan, create and improve and share ideas. These students are starting out with a successful experience in "doing science." This is the type of early childhood education that will result in building a scientifically literate society. All of Mrs. Pacheco-Suazo’s students will not become scientists, but all of her students will remember their first experience with science as a joyful one.