

Martha McLeod

TEEA 2017 Winner: Individual



Inspiring students to learn about the natural world through a hands-on approach.

Martha McLeod, an elementary science teacher at Fulton 4-5 Learning Center, has spent the last decade developing a unique style of teaching that goes beyond the classroom and dives into the natural world.

Stepping into Mrs. McLeod's classroom is an extraordinary experience. With an array of live animals and various bones from different species, students obtain a unique hands-on learning experience. The teacher has developed many outstanding programs that give her students the opportunity to touch, smell, hear, see, and taste what they are learning. An interesting aspect of her programs is how they grew from one another.

Mrs. McLeod's first campus program was her metal recycling project that teaches youth about the importance of conserving natural resources. The program encourages students to recycle aluminum cans and other scrap metal on behalf of the school. Because of their efforts, the campus has been one of the state's top recyclers in The Great American Can Roundup's school challenge for several years.

Using funds from the metal recycling project, Mrs. McLeod and her students created wildlife and vegetable gardens where they work diligently to raise chickens, grow vegetables, and learn about the pollination of plants. The campus gardens produced an overabundance of vegetables, which led Mrs. McLeod to open a booth at the local farmers market. This program teaches students about the supply and demand aspect of farming, while building rapport with the community.

Because the school's location lies within two major avian flyways, the wildlife gardens attract many migratory bird species. To satisfy curiosity from students and staff about the new visitors, Mrs.

McLeod started a youth birding team. Participating on the team gives students the opportunity to learn how to identify the winged visitors and their migratory habits. Each year, students on the team volunteer to attend ornithology classes before the regular school day begins. They also collaborate with birding experts who help Mrs. McLeod conduct weekly practice sessions and monthly field trips where students learn to use equipment and identify birds in the wild. The team was a finalist in the TEEA youth category in 2017 and members of the team often earn top honors at the annual "Great Texas Birding Classic" held by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

To support other wildlife programs in the area, Mrs. McLeod created a junior tour guide program at The Aquarium at Rockport Harbor. Here, her students serve as goodwill ambassadors to tourists while learning and sharing information about native marine life.

Perhaps the most impressive part of Mrs. McLeod's efforts is her authentic passion and hands-on approach to teaching that goes beyond what is required. She volunteers her time outside of the classroom to implement these programs with the hope of creating lifelong learners that understand the importance of protecting and conserving Earth's resources.