



FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

For Immediate Release

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Fund for the City of New York and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Announce Recipients of Third Annual Sloan Awards for Excellence in Teaching Science and Mathematics

Wide Array of New York City Public High Schools Represented

New York, NY (November 16, 2011) – The Fund for the City of New York today announced the recipients of the third annual Sloan Awards for Excellence in Teaching Science and Mathematics. The awards recognize exceptionally dedicated and creative New York City public high school teachers who have achieved outstanding results and inspired students of all backgrounds and abilities to pursue careers in science and mathematics.

“These great teachers share a passion for inspiring their students to love math and science by making learning interesting and challenging and pushing every student to do their best,” said Mary McCormick, president for the Fund for the City of New York. “We are recognizing their accomplishments to show that superb teaching can and does happen in schools across the city.”

The seven winners, who were chosen from applications submitted by parents, students, teachers and administrators throughout the five boroughs, will be honored tonight at a ceremony in the Great Hall at The Cooper Union. Each prize is \$7500 – \$5000 for each teacher and \$2500 to strengthen each school’s science of mathematics program.

The winners represent a diversity of schools, from a specialized school with a 99 percent graduation rate, to a school where 90 percent of incoming freshmen do not meet state standards for math and reading.

The winners are:

- Kate Belin, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School
- Marissa Bellino, High School for Environmental Studies
- Jim Cocoros, Stuyvesant High School
- Margaret DeSimone, Midwood High School
- Maria Cheryl R. Diangco, Sheepshead Bay High School
- Alia Jackson, Curtis High School
- Eliza Kuberska, Hunter College High School

“I want to extend my heartfelt thanks and congratulations to these seven inspiring teachers,” said Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott. “I applaud the Fund for the City of New York and the Sloan Foundation for honoring great teaching and highlighting the skills our students will need to succeed in life after high school.”

“You can’t provide a first class education without outstanding teachers and we want to recognize those teachers and support their work to show what’s possible when you have dedicated, smart and hard working teachers guiding public high school students to succeed in math and science,” said Dr. Paul L. Joskow, president of the Alfred P. Sloan foundation

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The Fund for the City of New York was established by the Ford Foundation in 1968 with the mandate to improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers. For over three decades, in partnership with government agencies, nonprofit institutions and foundations, the Fund has developed and helped to implement innovations in policy, programs, practices and technology in order to advance the functioning of government and nonprofit organizations in New York City and beyond.

ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is a philanthropic nonprofit institution established by Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. in 1934. Its main programs involve science and technology, standard of living and economic performance, education and careers in science and technology, selected national issues and a civic program. The goal of the civic program is to contribute to New York City by responding to social opportunities the city presents, and by funding high-leverage programs related to its areas of interest. The Sloan Public Service Awards, presented annually by the Fund for the City of New York, have been part of its civic program since 1985.

2011 Sloan Awards for Excellence in Teaching Science and Mathematics Recipients:



Alia Jackson

Physics (including IB Physics), Earth Science
Curtis High School

Alia Jackson, a self-described “Air Force brat,” grew up moving from town to town, as her father’s military postings shifted. She attended SUNY Plattsburgh, where she ran a physics and astronomy lab -- an unusual amount of responsibility for an undergraduate.

Today, Jackson shares her love of physics with students at Curtis High School by making her classes fun. She has taken her students to Six Flags to see how various rides affected heart rate, and her physics classes typically include projects like construction of water-powered rockets and rubber band powered cars.

In her six years at Curtis, she has established a phenomenal track record: she single-handedly created the school’s International Baccalaureate program’s physics curriculum and her pass rate on the Physics Regents is almost 100 percent.

Her contagious enthusiasm for physics is making a difference in the careers her students pursue. A former student is getting her degree in civil engineering, which involves a lot of physics, thanks to Jackson. "After taking her class I knew that I wanted to continue throughout college and my career."



Jim Cocoros

Honors Pre-Calculus, Calculus BC, Math Team
Stuyvesant High School

Jim Cocoros grew up in rural Maryland where he taught himself calculus while home sick for half his junior year. While tutoring and teaching an occasional class in high school, Cocoros learned two things: he loved sharing and explaining problems and it took an enormous amount of time to consider various methods for presenting material.

Cocoros is an extremely dedicated teacher: each school year, he fills a spreadsheet with student comments and achievements, allowing him to calibrate the speed and level of each lesson and ensure that every student is keeping up. It also allows him to give individualized college advice and to write finely tuned recommendation letters, about which even college admissions officers rave.

When MIT asked its freshmen to name their most influential teacher, nine students named Cocoros. "I have dozens of good teachers," said Stuyvesant High School Principal Stanley Teitel, "But no one with Mr. Cocoros' level of energy and student engagement."

Cocoros' enthusiasm and dedication reaches beyond the Stuyvesant walls—he now leads the citywide math team.



Margaret DeSimone

Living Environment (and Lab), Anatomy and Physiology
Midwood High School

A Midwood High School senior used to score 60s in Margaret DeSimone's anatomy class. But that changed quickly.

"She treated everyone, the quick and the slow learners, with the same respect and care," said the student who next year will study science at Hunter on a scholarship. "I want to be a doctor," she says. "Ms. DeSimone opened my eyes to lots of medical topics, she gave me options, and she gave me confidence."

This is just one of countless examples in which DeSimone has touched the lives of her students. "It's not a problem reaching the gifted or even the average student," said a science department colleague. "The challenge is to reach the uninterested, and Ms. DeSimone is the master."

To help the poorer performers, DeSimone calls every home for 6 months to ensure students show up. And, she created an Anatomy and Physiology elective where otherwise uninterested students are shocked into attention. As a result, "Her students are hungry for more science classes and inspired to pursue medical careers," says a school AP Psychology teacher.

It is no surprise her colleagues would be impressed. When she is not helping students, DeSimone routinely helps other teachers craft their own lesson plans.



Maria Cheryl R. Diangco

AP Biology, Science Research
Sheepshead Bay High School

In 2004, when Maria Cheryl Diangco arrived at Sheepshead Bay High School as a foreign teaching recruit from the Philippines, student science research was virtually defunct. The rest of the school was not doing any better.

In the past seven years the school has made a giant shift, and Ms. Diangco was part of the team that engineered the dramatic turnaround. Sheepshead Bay now boasts a science curriculum and research program with real credibility. Ms. Diangco has propelled her students—and other students at the school—to pursue science research through projects, competitions, and summer research programs at CUNY, all of which have influenced their career choices. “Because of her there were science students that excelled,” said a former student, now a biology major at Brooklyn College.

And as part of Sheepshead Bay’s “restart” effort, Ms. Diangco is coordinating its new Science Research Academy, which offers students the opportunity to take additional science courses—marine science, aviation, biodiversity, meteorology, geology—throughout their four years.

“She’s got a spirit that’s so lively and upbeat that you’re happy to be there, even though it’s AP biology first period,” said a junior.



Kate Belin

Geometry, Functions
Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

Kate Belin, a Youngstown, NY native, teaches at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, where 90 percent of entering 9th graders do not meet state standards in math or English. The school is ranked 10th from the bottom among all New York City public high schools. Yet, Belin “gets students who don’t know the multiplication table to understand complex mathematical concepts,” said Kelly Gaddis, Professor of Math Education at Bard College.

A former student neatly sums up the essence of Belin’s teaching style: “She [Belin] makes me see that math has connections to the real world, and it’s going to be with me every day of my life.”

Belin has tailored experiential teaching to her class curriculum and placed emphasis on questioning and evaluating problems – not simply on formulas and solving equations – helping her students think about issues in mathematics for the first time in their lives.

“It’s worth noting that at least one of Ms. Belin’s students per year goes on to be a math major in college,” said Gaddis.

Her strategies have brought her attention from national organizations dedicated to improving math education. The Algebra Project and Math for America teachers go to her for advice.



Marissa Bellino

Environment Seminar, Global Environment, Environmental Science Research

High School for Environmental Studies

If the High School for Environmental Studies, a powerful force for “green” curriculum development, has a poster-child, it is Marissa Bellino. Starting with her efforts to reorganize the school’s entire science facility and culminating with student field trips to Japan, Bellino has taken the school’s already strong program to new heights. “She creates

opportunities for the kids that they wouldn’t have otherwise,” said a colleague, who co-taught a research class with her until last summer.

Case in point: the Japan trips, in which she and six students joined teachers and teens from high schools in Japan, Thailand, and Poland. They met with environmental experts to discuss how the global community can halve CO2 emissions by 2050 and came up with real-life ideas for energy sustainability.

Offering students new opportunities, creating a cutting-edge curriculum, and working on solving the most pressing issues in the field of environmental science has led Bellino’s students to pursue careers in environmental science. A former student spent a month in rural New Jersey building trails and bridges under Bellino’s leadership. “I wouldn’t be majoring in environmental studies without that experience,” said the current Vassar junior.



Eliza M. Kuberska

Algebra II/Geometry, AP Statistics, Problem Solving
Hunter College High School

Eliza Kuberska has loved math ever since growing up in a disciplined and intensely intellectual family in Poland. She is known at Hunter College High School, where she has been teaching for six years, for her challenging but instructive problem sets, hours of dedicated extra help sessions, and leadership of the powerhouse Junior/Senior Math Team.

She discovered that even in a school with a 99 percent graduation rate, where 25 percent of graduates attend an Ivy League college, students have an aversion to taking risks and give up when a problem appears too difficult. Instead of shying away, she challenges her students to take on increasingly complex problems and sees it as her mission to jolt her students out of their high level academic complacency. And, in a world in which only one in seven professional mathematicians is female, Kuberska pays close attention to her female students, always keeping them confident, curious and involved.

“Her great strength as a teacher is that she loves math and she loves her kids,” said a colleague. “With her enthusiasm, she gets kids to love mathematics. The raw energy is incredible, and the kids know she wants them to love math and do well. She models for them what it means to be a lifelong learner.”