

DECATUR



Trading a crown for a lab coat

DeKalb 5th grader wins state STEM competition, advocates for minorities in science

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On any typical weekday or weekend, Wadsworth Magnet School for High Achievers fifth-grader **Temple Lester** can be found making videos about science, culinary skills and the fine arts—all with the purpose of helping other people.

"It makes me feel like a good person," Lester said. "It makes me feel like I'm helping them to do better than before. If people do better, they can achieve more than they originally thought... I hope kids know they can choose whatever they want to be."

Lester's skills in science, public speaking and videography have been recently rewarded, as she was declared one of three winners in the Georgia Science Teachers Association's STEM Talk competition.

The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Talk competition was created to provide kindergarten through 12th grade students a platform to share how STEM is impacting their lives. Students are instructed to develop five-minute videos discussing how STEM is shaping the future.

"When I found out I won, I was shocked," Lester said. "It was K-12 and the other winners are 12th graders. It was from all around the state of Georgia and I'm just one person out of about 900 to 1,000 people! It feels really good. It feels like I can do anything."

Lester's video, titled "The Time I Traded My Crown for a Lab Jacket," details her curiosity about how things work, math proficiency and her discovery of the shortage of women in STEM fields. She relates an experience of attending science camp where she was the only girl in the session and referred to as "a little princess."

"I thought to myself, 'Am I in a castle? And if I am, I'm in the wrong place,'" Lester states in the video. "I told her, 'I'm not a princess, I'm a scientist.'"

In the video, Lester states this experience prompted her to do research. She explains that male and female students do equally well in math and science on standardized tests and that men and women make up equal parts of a college-educated workforce, but only 29 percent of women work in STEM-related fields.

"Why is there such a big gap?" Lester asks. "Just 35.2 percent of chemists are women. Only 11.1 percent of all astronomers are women and 7.9 percent of all mechanical engineers are women."

Lester concludes by stating key

research findings including such social barriers as stereotypes, gender bias and the climate of science departments in higher education.

According to Lester, her passion for science has led to a passion for making videos. At the end of her STEM Talk submission, she details her website, www.JustTemple.com—which serves as a platform for videos of Lester performing experiments, cooking, arts and crafts—and states it is specifically aimed at girls.

"I wanted to show kids, especially girls, that they're allowed in STEM [fields]," Lester said. "They can have thoughts, learn different things and learn science. It helps me help other people."

Lester said the website—launched when she was in third grade—helped her develop her skills in public speaking, learn to hone her message and appreciate her own opinions. She said she eventually wants to be on a high school or college debate team.

Lester's parents, **Tommy** and **Jennifer Lester**, said they decided to let Temple explore her own interests rather than direct her.

"We followed her interests," Jennifer Lester said. "We didn't focus them as to what we think they should be. At an early age, my husband shared his 'man cave' and turned it into a science lab for [Temple]. Being able to expose her to things that explore her interests and allow her to decide what she's interested in is very important."

According to Wadsworth Magnet principal **Cornelia Crumb**, Temple is "a cut above the rest."

"It was very obvious to us the first day she entered the building that she was, in addition to being a high achiever, super intelligent, smart and full of enthusiasm," Crumb said. "Temple is going to go on to become the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, I guarantee you that. She doesn't look at the world in the small setting that we are in, she's looking globally. She wants to solve problems."

Lester said she plans to eventually work at NASA as an astronomer. She said she loves stars, constellations, zodiac, planets and the universe.

"There aren't a lot of women in STEM and I want to work in STEM when I grow up," Lester said. "It offended me to find out there aren't a lot of women in STEM, even though they do equally well as men. We can do equally well—we can do better than men."

As a contest winner, Lester spoke in front of more than 1,500 teachers in Athens as part of the 2017 Georgia STEM Forum.



Wadsworth Magnet School for High Achievers fifth-grader Temple Lester was recently announced as a winner for the Georgia Science Teachers Association's 2017 STEM Talk awards.