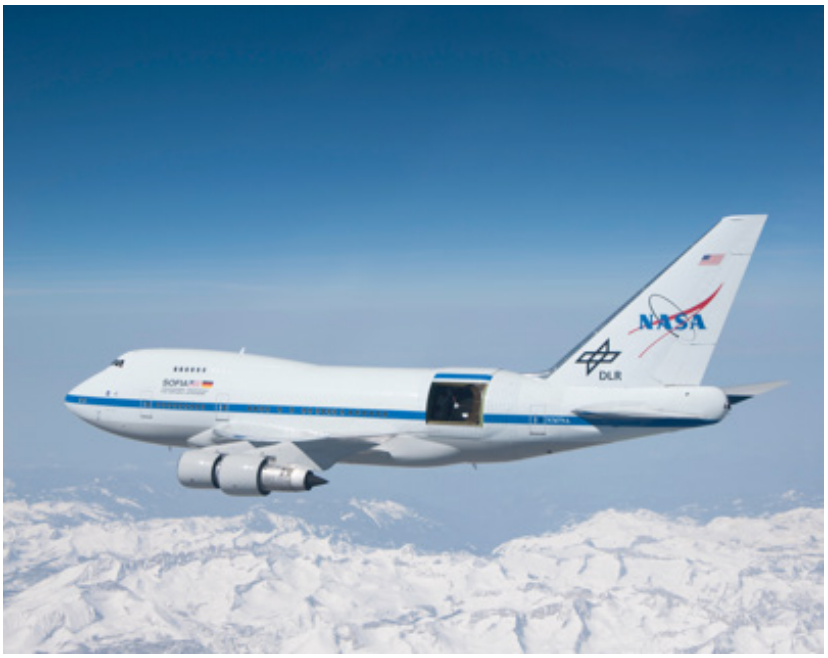
High School Science Teachers Named Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors – Will Fly on NASA's SOFIA Aircraft



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT

Rebecca McDonald
Director of Communications
SETI Institute
rmcdonald@SETI.org
650-960-4526

Dana Backman
AAA Principal Investigator
SETI Institute
dbackman@seti.org

February 26, 2019, Mountain View, CA -- The SETI Institute has partnered with 14 school districts in eight states for the 2019 NASA Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors (AAA) program. The AAA program is a professional development opportunity for high school science teachers designed to improve science teaching & learning and increase student STEM engagement. The SETI Institute has managed the AAA program since its inception in 2011.

AAA participant teachers receive training in astrophysics and planetary science, content and pedagogy. Their training includes a week-long immersion experience at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center Hangar 703 in Palmdale, California with participation in research flights onboard NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA). The program culminates in classroom delivery of a SOFIA science-oriented curriculum module. Impact on student STEM learning & engagement will be measured by WestEd education evaluators.

SOFIA is a highly modified Boeing 747SP airliner fitted with a 2.7-meter (106-inch) telescope and using a suite of seven cameras & spectrographs to study celestial objects at infrared wavelengths. SOFIA operates during 10-hour overnight science missions at altitudes between 39,000 and 45,000 feet (12-14 kilometers), above more than 99 percent of the water vapor in Earth's atmosphere that blocks infrared light from reaching ground-based observatories.

"NASA's SOFIA observatory provides a fantastic opportunity for teachers to better understand and appreciate the research process by interacting with scientists and mission crew members," said Dr. Dana Backman, AAA program Principal Investigator. "The teachers can then take what they learn back to their classrooms, schools, and school districts, conveying the value of scientific research and adding real-world content to high school learning environments. The AAA's first-hand experiences also can illuminate the wide variety of STEM career paths available to students."

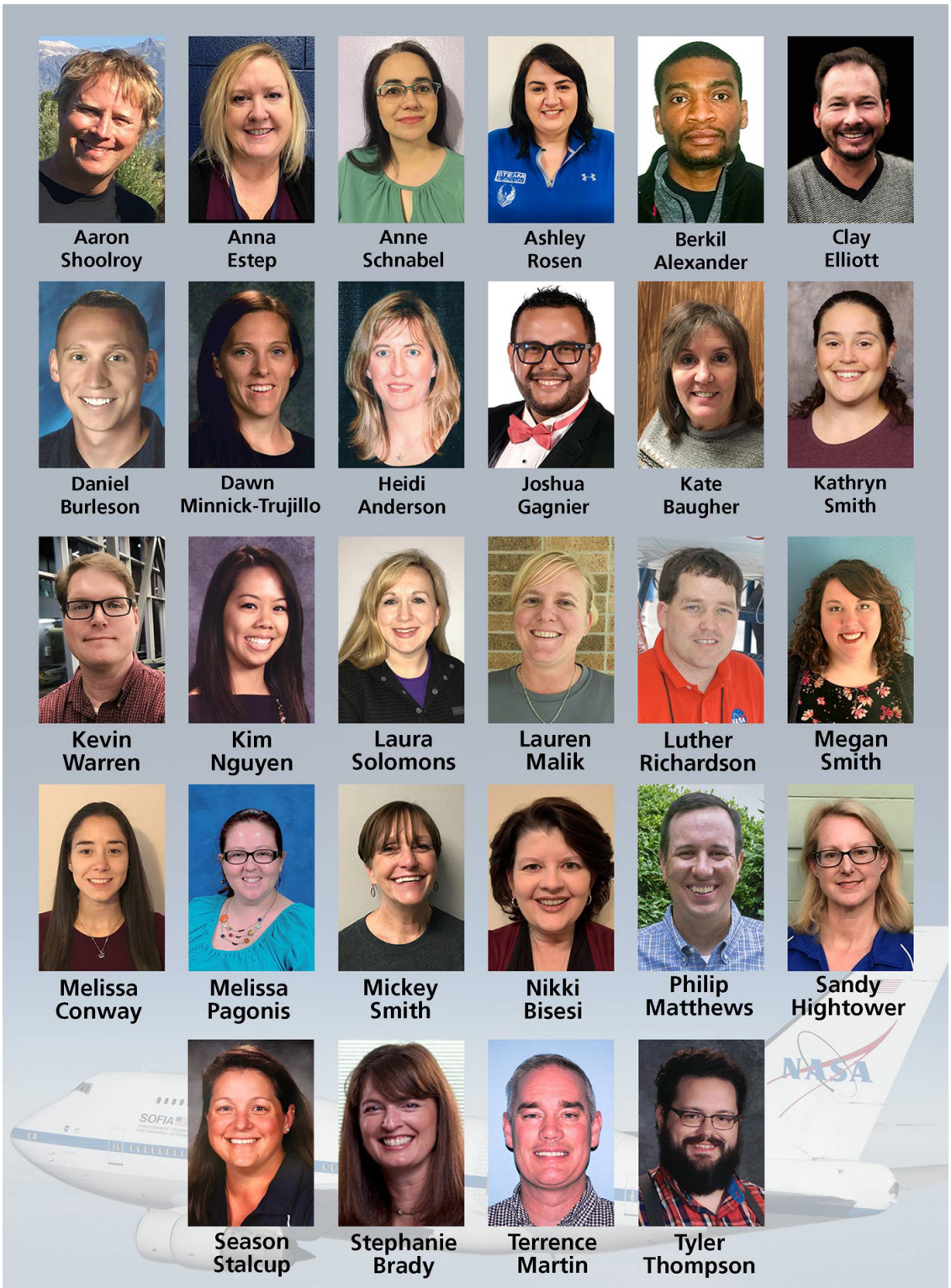
The school districts participating in the 2019 Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors program are:

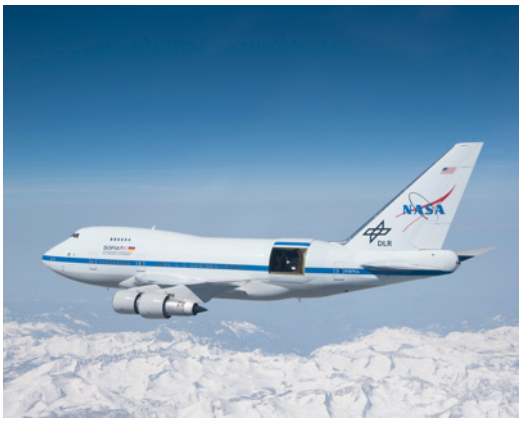
Anaheim Union High School District, California
Clark County School District, Nevada
Cobb County Schools, Georgia
School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties, South Carolina
Fayette County Public Schools, Kentucky
Harmony Public Schools, Texas
William S. Hart Union High School District, California
Manteca Unified School District, California
Muscogee County School District, Georgia
Norman Public School District, Oklahoma
Northside Independent School District (San Antonio), Texas
Santa Ana Unified School District, California
Washoe County School District, Nevada

The 28 teachers selected from partner districts as 2019 Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors are listed and pictured below:

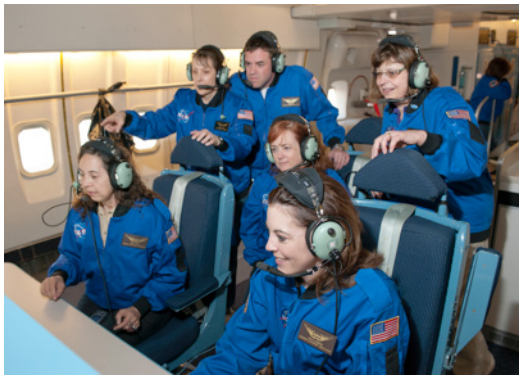
Berkil Alexander, Kennesaw Mountain High School, Kennesaw, Georgia
Heidi Anderson, Locust Trace AgriScience Center, Lexington, Kentucky
Kathryn Baugher, Norman North High School, Norman, Oklahoma
Nikki Bisesi, Hillgrove High School, Powder Springs, Georgia
Stephanie Brady, Norman High School, Norman, Oklahoma
Daniel Burleson, Rancho High School, Las Vegas, Nevada
Melissa Conway, Spring Hill High School, Chapin, South Carolina
Clay Elliott, Oxford Academy, Anaheim, California
Anna Estep, Chapin High School, Chapin, South Carolina
Joshua Gagnier, Santa Ana High School, Santa Ana, California
Sandra Hightower, Century High School, Santa Ana, California
Lauren Malik, William Howard Taft High School, San Antonio, Texas
Terrence Martin, William Howard Taft High School, San Antonio, Texas
Philip Matthews, Kennesaw Mountain High School, Kennesaw, Georgia
Dawn Minnick-Trujillo, Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, Las Vegas, Nevada
Kim Nguyen, Oxford Academy, Anaheim, California
Melissa Pagonis, John Paul Stevens High School, San Antonio, Texas
Luther Richardson, Columbus High School, Columbus, Georgia
Ashley Rosen, STEAM Academy, Lexington, Kentucky
Anne Schnabel, Tom C. Clark High School, San Antonio, Texas

Aaron Shoolroy, Reno High School, Reno, Nevada
Kathryn Smith, William S. Hart High School, Santa Clarita, California
Megan Smith, Lathrop High School, Manteca, California
Mickey Smith, Earl Wooster High School, Reno, Nevada
Laura Solomons, Columbus High School, Columbus, Georgia
Season Stalcup, Wheeler High School, Marietta, Georgia
Tyler Thompson, West Career and Technical Academy, Las Vegas, Nevada
Kevin Warren, Norman North High School, Norman, Oklahoma





(Figure 1) NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy, SOFIA, during a day-time test flight over the Sierra Nevada with the telescope door open (aft of the wing). (NASA)



(Figure 2) A group of Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors plus their flight facilitator at the educators' console onboard SOFIA. (NASA)

About the SETI Institute

Founded in 1984, the SETI Institute is a non-profit, multi-disciplinary research and education organization whose mission is to explore, understand, and explain the origin and nature of life in the universe and the evolution of intelligence. Our research encompasses the physical and biological sciences and leverages expertise in data analytics, machine learning and advanced signal detection technologies. The SETI Institute is a distinguished research partner for industry, academia and government agencies, including NASA and NSF.

About the Airborne Astronomy Ambassador Program

The SETI Institute's NASA Airborne Astronomy Ambassador Program was one of the 27 organizations from across the United States selected by NASA for cooperative agreement awards to implement a new strategic approach to more effectively engage learners of all ages on NASA science education programs and activities. Selections were made by the agency's Science Mission Directorate (SMD) in Washington, DC, through the Science Education Cooperative Agreement Notice. Selectee activities will support Earth science, astrophysics, planetary science and heliophysics. AAA is funded by NASA SMD NNX16AC51A.