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PRESS RELEASE

BASD Middle School Educator Selected for Smithsonian Teacher Innovator Institute

Bethlehem, PA – March 30, 2026 – The Bethlehem Area School District is proud to announce that Traci Schanewolf, a 6th grade science teacher at Northeast Middle School, has been selected to participate in the prestigious Teacher Innovator Institute at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

The Teacher Innovator Institute is a highly selective professional development program designed to help middle school educators bring museum-based learning into their classrooms. By exploring the connections between informal STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) education and authentic classroom experiences, participants gain innovative strategies to engage students in meaningful learning.

The two-week immersive program, taking place in summer 2026, will include more than 80 educators from across the country, including both returning participants and a new cohort of 30 teachers. Through hands-on activities, behind-the-scenes museum experiences, guided tours, and collaborative group work, participants will learn directly from Smithsonian educators and content experts. The program emphasizes the use of aerospace science, history, and technology to inspire creative and authentic instructional practices.

Educators selected for the institute commit to two weeks of participation each summer over a two-year period. During that time, they engage in intensive learning sessions and develop a professional development plan to implement innovative teaching practices in their schools and districts.

“Being selected for the Smithsonian Teacher Innovator Institute is one of the greatest honors of my teaching career,” said Schanewolf. “I’m so excited to collaborate with Smithsonian experts and educators from across the country, and to bring fresh, innovative ideas back to my students and colleagues. Everything I learn through this fellowship, I’ll carry back into our classroom, and I can’t wait to see the impact it has on the incredible kids I get to teach every day.”

“This is an outstanding achievement for both Traci and our district,” said Dr. Maureen Leeson, Assistant Superintendent of BASD. “Opportunities like the Teacher Innovator Institute allow our educators to deepen their practice, explore innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and bring back experiences that directly benefit our students. We are incredibly proud of Traci’s dedication to her craft and her commitment to creating engaging, meaningful learning experiences.”

Now in her second year at Northeast Middle School and BASD, Schanewolf is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Lehigh University. She is actively involved



in enriching student experiences beyond the classroom, leading several after-school clubs including Dungeons & Dragons and cinema studies.

Schanewolf has also helped bring innovative programming to Northeast, including the “Medical Mysteries” after-school program, a six-week collaboration with the Da Vinci Science Center and Lehigh Valley Health Network, which provides students with hands-on exposure to real-world medical science. Additionally, she is part of an effort to bring a traveling planetarium experience to Northeast, expanding opportunities for students and families to explore astronomy.

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About the Bethlehem Area School District

The Bethlehem Area School District is the 6th largest school district in Pennsylvania serving nearly 13,000 culturally and economically diverse students in 22 community-based schools. The district serves five municipalities: City of Bethlehem, Bethlehem Township, Hanover Township, Freemansburg, and Fountain Hill. The district enjoys numerous community partnerships with universities, businesses, and arts providers that extend the schools’ rich curricular and co-curricular offerings.