



## 2021 National Teacher of the Year FINALIST



**Maureen Stover**

North Carolina

School: Cumberland International  
Early College High

Subjects: Secondary Education,  
Biology, Earth and Environmental  
Science

Grades: 9, 10



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**Maureen Stover** is the 2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year (NCTOY). Prior to her position as the NCTOY, she taught 9th and 10th grade biology, earth and environmental science, and advancement via individual determination (AVID) at Cumberland International Early College High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Stover has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and worked as an educational consultant for the National Science Teaching Association. She earned a Bachelor of Science in biology from the United States Air Force Academy (Class of 1997), a Master of Arts in Education (in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum and instruction) from Adams State University in Colorado, a Master of Arts in Teaching (in secondary science) from Western Governors University North Carolina, and a Leadership Certificate in STEM education from Teachers College Columbia University. As an educator, Stover is dedicated to improving educational opportunities for every student through equitable education initiatives. She seeks to provide clear pathways for students to successfully enter the career or college program of their choice upon graduation from high school. Prior to becoming a teacher, Stover served as an Intelligence Officer in the United States Air Force. In this role, she served as a flight commander, watch officer, and executive officer. Her military experience includes directing indications and warnings for 1,000 flights over Iraq, including 25 combat strike missions with zero combat losses. She was lauded by her commander as critical to the USAF's War on Terrorism.

### **Application Questions**

- 1. Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? How did that learning influence your students? How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit?**

My students are my ikigai. In Japanese culture, ikigai means life's purpose. My ikigai is to guide my students' academic, social, and emotional development as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. I take a humanistic approach to teaching by delivering motivating, meaningful content. I cultivate a positive learning space where students engage in hands-on activities that make learning relevant. I develop personalized, student-centered lessons that support students in their learning, even when they struggle. The environment fosters a safe learning space where students can come when they need help and where they know their ideas are valued and respected. The colorful, inviting space encourages students to feel at home when they walk into the room. I am excited to be at school every day, and I want the classroom to reflect and convey that to my students. The walls in our room are decorated with students' projects and artwork. I showcase my students' projects and products, so they know the products they make in our class are valued and important.

My beliefs about learning led me to use data-driven instruction to tailor and personalize lessons for each student based on their unique educational needs. Before I begin instruction, I use Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) projections and prior course summative assessment data to identify students who will benefit from targeted or intensive intervention to achieve standards mastery. Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), I place students into tiers to provide individualized instruction that is geared to each student's unique educational needs. I firmly believe that every child has the ability to learn and it is my responsibility to find

the best way to help each of my students maximize their academic potential. I use data-driven instruction to collect data from a variety of learning activities and artifacts, to monitor the effectiveness of instruction and to adjust and modify instruction as needed. I see mistakes as a valuable part of the learning process, and I help my students understand how they can use mistakes to improve themselves.

The biology macromolecules unit defines my teaching style. This unit provides the foundation for the biology course of study and enables me to introduce the structure of learning in our classroom. I begin by outlining the measurable objectives and provide a clear learning path so my students know exactly what I expect them to learn and how they will be assessed.

As I begin instruction, the content must be relevant. For the macromolecules unit, I bring in a variety of groceries from my house. The grocery items include a unique mix of ethnic and culturally diverse foods and spices and traditional foods. As students collaborate to categorize the foods, they are learning to organize, developing group dynamics, and engaging in a non-threatening environment that cultivates multi-cultural conversations about family and cultural traditions related to food.

I use a variety of methods and strategies to ensure I meet the needs of each student's unique learning style and preference. Material is presented using a variety of mediums. Students engage in reading activities, videos, direct instruction/teacher presentations, podcasts, labs, and hands-on learning experiences. When developing a lesson, I ensure that I teach each standard at least three times using varying methods of instruction. In addition to whole group instruction, I also use small group and one-on-one instruction/remediation.

I do not give traditional tests. Instead, I use performance assessment tools that enable students to demonstrate their understanding in a creative or unique way that matches their preferred learning style. For instance, in the Macromolecules unit, my students worked in pairs to write a song or a poem that outlined the four types of macromolecules and identified the monomers, polymers, and function of each group. The students amazed me with their creativity. One student played her ukulele, and another student played her flute. Several students pre-recorded videos and others elected to perform their product live. Because students had an opportunity to show their knowledge by developing their own project, they took ownership of the assignment and were excited to demonstrate their mastery of the content.

By designing student-centered lessons that are tailored to each student's strengths and preferred learning style, I can deliver instruction that meets my students exactly where they are in their learning journey. Each year less than half of my students are projected to score a proficient score on the biology end of course exam. For the past three years, over 90% of my students have demonstrated proficiency. Our classroom is a space where students flourish.

**2. Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture. What was your role, how did you collaborate with others, and what is the status of this project today? Please include evidence of student impact.**

At my school, we foster a school culture of success. We firmly believe that each student can be a successful learner, and it is our responsibility to personalize instruction with embedded supports that enable each student to thrive and flourish. Our school's commitment to our students engages a team that has each student's success as the priority. The team includes classroom teachers, administration, support staff, and parents.

I use data-driven instruction to identify gaps in knowledge and to personalize instruction for each of my students based on their unique learning needs. My principal recognized the effectiveness of this instructional model and we collaborated to extend this model school-wide. Many of our students are identified as high dropout risks exiting middle school. As a team, we developed an initiative to pinpoint at-risk students using data and teacher observation of academic and behavior progress. This process enabled us to monitor students who would benefit from targeted academic or behavioral supports. Once identified, teachers met in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to analyze data, brainstorm strategies and best practices, and to determine the best course of action to ensure success for every student.

As part of this initiative, I created professional development seminars and a data tracking tool to assist educators in using state-provided projection data and data collected from a variety of artifacts to identify gaps in knowledge. After identifying gaps, I demonstrated how to implement research-based instructional strategies and methods to inform and personalize instruction to meet each student's unique needs. The data tracking tool enabled teachers to articulate and find common areas of concern across curricular areas. Collaborating as a PLC, teachers could develop common, personalized learning and behavioral goals that remained consistent as the at-risk student moved from class to class. This enabled our teachers to fully support each individual student, to meet each student exactly where they were, and to provide personalized instruction for every student.

Since starting this program, teachers are empowered to advocate for their students' success and students are empowered to thrive. Our commitment to our students leads to high expectations and an overall environment at our school that encourages success. Students take ownership of their learning because they realize success and they know that every teacher, administrator, support staffer, and parent is dedicated to their success in and out of the classroom. We focus on ensuring that each of our students knows that they can be successful and that they can learn. All the stakeholders in our program support our students and make the success of each student at our school our number one priority. For the past three years, our school has posted a 100% graduation rate. This program was key to that successful metric.

Our school's culture of success is infectious. The teachers, administration, support staff, and parents all believe in our students and are dedicated to each student's success. When stakeholders believe in our students, the students begin to believe in themselves and when students believe in themselves magic can happen!

**3. How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom? Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. Please include evidence of student impact.**

As a United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) graduate and military officer, I developed into a servant leader committed to service before self. This philosophy has influenced my teaching career and my personal life. One of my primary goals as a teacher and active member in the Fayetteville community is to help our youth realize their potential and help them seize amazing opportunities in and out of the classroom.

As my school's Key Club Advisor, I guide my students through volunteer activities with the Second Harvest Food Bank, the Fayetteville State University Green Team, and provide multiple opportunities to contribute to our community through volunteer programs. I help students research and apply for activities that support our community and promote volunteerism. Through volunteering, my students learn the importance of strong communities and civic involvement. These opportunities provide a sense of accomplishment and pride in our community and encourage students to continue volunteering as adults. I also work with students to look for opportunities to engage in internships at local colleges and companies. These internships help connect our community partners with our students and provide students with real-world experiences and application of knowledge.

Last fall, my students worked with environmental scientists on the USS Nautilus to collect and analyze data on sea life and climate change. My students worked from our classroom and connected through skype with the scientists to discuss the data. The scientists also answered questions about research, education, and careers. This was an outstanding opportunity for my students to talk with scientists currently working in the field and to see how the information we learned and the data we collected in our classroom was applied to solve real world problems.

In 2017, I was asked to spearhead a swimming program at a high school in a low-wealth community. Several students at the school wanted to swim, but there were no teachers who were willing to coach. As a competitive swimmer from the age of five to twenty-two, I eagerly accepted the opportunity to spearhead the new program. The first year, we had one swimmer. Three seasons later, we have a sustainable team! It has been very rewarding to watch these athletes work hard and realize success in the pool that will translate to confidence in their ability to be successful in life.

Over the past five years, I have promoted cultural literacy by sponsoring and chaperoning trips to destinations like Selma, Alabama, and the Galapagos Islands. Each of these trips has included service-related activities that foster an understanding of global communities and the importance of helping others outside of our local area.

In my community, I also work with school-aged children as an USAFA Admissions Liaison Officer (ALO) and a scout leader. I have mentored over 20 Eagle Scouts and have helped students from the Fayetteville area navigate the USAFA nomination and appointment process. The children that I work with directly benefit from the structure and leadership development in these programs.

**4. What do you consider to be a major public education issue today? Describe how you demonstrate being a lifelong learner, leader, and innovator about this issue both inside and outside the classroom walls.**

Today's major public issue is providing equitable educational opportunities that enable every student to reach their maximum individual potential. Today's teachers must find ways to provide effective instruction, with less funding, to an increasingly diverse group of learners.

As an educator, I develop innovative, individualized lesson plans that meet the diverse learners' unique needs in my classroom. I implement research-based methods, strategies, and culturally responsive practices in my instructional design to ensure I help each student learn in the way that is best for them. To develop individualized lessons, I quantify performance and behavioral objectives and differentiate instruction to meet each student's unique needs. While developing lessons, I monitor students' mastery of objectives to identify gaps in knowledge and adjust instruction. I use data-driven instruction to collect information from various artifacts related to a standard or learning objective to determine a student's overall mastery of the desired learning outcome. This practice enables me to develop individualized learning activities designed to help students bridge gaps to acquire knowledge in a way that works best for their individual learning styles and requirements. Providing equitable opportunities through culturally responsive teaching and intentional consideration of each student's circumstances is an essential part of my teaching practices.

I seek to improve my teaching practice through formal and informal learning opportunities. I actively pursue graduate-level and professional development courses to improve my content knowledge and pedagogical practice. I have earned Masters degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Curriculum Instruction and Secondary Science Teaching. Improving my teaching practice enables me to identify research-based methods and strategies that I can use to develop and implement effective, equitable instruction in my classroom. I fill additional duty positions that enable me to develop, present, and facilitate professional development seminars and sessions at the site, district, and state-levels. I have created and facilitated content area and leadership sessions focused on equitable education. These sessions present classroom implementation strategies and practices that incorporate culturally responsive and restorative practices with standards-aligned activities and lessons that engage students in the learning process while analyzing data to determine student shortfall and educational gaps. A member of my school's Instructional Leadership Cadre, I develop and present monthly seminars covering topics including effective data analysis, data-driven instruction lesson design, differentiating instruction, effective practices, and translating research-based instructional models and strategies into effective classroom lesson design. I was awarded a Leadership Certificate of STEM Education from the Teachers College, Columbia University. For this program, I created and presented a professional development program designed to enhance student success in math and science through culturally relevant art and music using the Fibonacci sequence across content areas. I authored a cross-curricular educator's resource guide and developed a series of professional development seminars presented over 18 weeks to infuse the Fibonacci curriculum into core and elective classes. The professional development series provided teachers with background knowledge, differentiated, classroom-ready activities, assessment data analysis assistance, and continuous lesson design and implementation support.

**5. As the 2021 National Teacher of the Year, you serve as a spokesperson and representative for all teachers and students. What is your message? What will you communicate to your profession and to the public?**

As an educator, I do not see problems in education but rather opportunities for solutions. My message to educational professionals and the public focuses on two main areas: equitable educational opportunities and an increased focus on educating the whole child. The COVID-19 global pandemic has focused the public's attention on each of these areas. This renewed focus provides the educational community with the opportunity to discuss challenges and solutions with policymakers and the public. My message is tailored to communicate to teachers and the public how each of these issues affects students in today's classrooms, areas for improvement, and practical solutions to implement initiatives in our classrooms nation-wide.

As educators and a nation, we are obligated to provide equitable opportunities for every student enrolled in our public schools. Our nation's most valuable treasure is our students, and we must provide an education that prepares every child to be career and college ready when they exit our PK-12 public schools. We must proactively identify the barriers to education and develop actionable, transformative solutions that ensure an equitable education for every child. Inequities have always existed in our public education system, but the COVID-19 global pandemic has magnified many of these inequities' adverse effects. We must structure education so race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and other factors we use to place our students into subgroups no longer influence the quality of education students receive. The framework for equitable solutions exists in many states, but this must be a nationwide priority that policymakers, educational leaders, and community partners are committed to resolving for students currently enrolled in school and future generations of Americans.

Part of the equity solution is increasing the number of teachers of color we have in classrooms. Research indicates that students benefit from seeing themselves in their teachers. In North Carolina, approximately 80% of the teachers are white females, but about 50% of the students enrolled in our public schools are scholars of color (Antoszyk, 2016). A critical step to getting more teachers of color into classrooms is to remove barriers to post-secondary education and licensure. Programs such as teacher cadets, state and federally sponsored teaching fellowships, robust and innovative teacher recruitment initiatives, mid-career transition programs, and structured support of pre-service and beginning teachers during their initial licensure can provide multiple pathways for highly qualified teachers to enter our classrooms.

The solutions to provide equitable opportunities require collaboration between our public schools and our community and industry partners. We must acknowledge that barriers to a basic, sound education exist in our public schools, especially for our students in historically marginalized populations. We must begin removal of these barriers to promote equity. We must foster school-wide environments that support culturally responsive instruction, and we must provide clear pathways for Teachers of Color to enter our classrooms. As a teacher, I see this as the most important obligation we have to our kids. Providing an equitable education for every student in the United States will be one of the most important and most impactful actions to improve public education.

The second part of my message focuses on educating the whole child through an intentional, robust social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum in our PK-12 public schools. As educators, we do more for our students than delivering academic content. We are dedicated to our students' social, emotional, and intellectual development. For students to be successful in school, we must first address their basic needs. We use Bloom's taxonomy as a framework to develop lesson plans and cultivate classrooms designed to foster self-actualization. We encourage our students to create products that demonstrate mastery of concepts and to realize their ultimate potential. However, our students must have their physiological, safety, love, belonging, and esteem needs met first to reach these levels. This is why educating the whole child through SEL becomes a critical component of our public education system.

To adequately address students' needs, teachers should be trained to identify students who will benefit from SEL intervention. We know that many of our students and teachers will return to brick-and-mortar classrooms with trauma related to the pandemic. We need to prepare teachers to deliver trauma informed instruction and provide mental-health resources for teachers and students. We also need to increase funding for additional nurses and counselors in our public schools to meet our students' SEL needs. We can meet the academic and SEL needs of our children through intentional and explicit SEL practices.

**Resume**

**Education**

School	North Carolina State University
Degree	Non-Degree Program
Major	Bioeconomy Education
Years Attended	2018-Present

School	Western Governors University
Degree	Master of Art in Teaching
Major	Secondary Science Education
Years Attended	2019-2020

School	Adams State University
Degree	Master of Art in Education
Major	STEM Curriculum and Instruction
Years Attended	2016

School	Columbia University, Teacher's College
Degree	Non- Degree Program
Major	Leadership Certificate
Years Attended	2016

School	United States Air Force Academy
Degree	Bachelor of Science
Major	Biology
Years Attended	1993-1997

### **Certifications**

Certification	Advanced Placement Physics
Year Obtained	2020

Certification	North Carolina Science, 6-12
Year Obtained	2016

Certification	North Carolina, Biology, 9-12
Year Obtained	2014

Certification	Florida, Biology 6-12
Year Obtained	2009

Certification	Florida, Elementary Education, K-6
Year Obtained	2009

### **Experience**

Title	Science and AVID Teacher
Organization	Cumberland International Early College High School
Years in Position	March – March 2016, July 2017- Present

Title	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher
Organization	Reid Ross Middle School
Years in Position	2016-2017

Title	Senior Online Advisor
Organization	National Science Teaching Association
Years in Position	2010-2016

Title	Science Lab Teacher and Grant Teacher
Organization	Eglin Elementary School
Years in Position	2009-2010

Title	Physical Science Teacher
Organization	Choctawhatchee High School
Years in Position	2009

### **Leadership**

Position	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Beginning Teacher Mentor
Organization	Cumberland International Early College High School
Years in Position	2019-Present

Position	Pre-Service Cooperating Teacher
Organization	Fayetteville State and Methodist State
Years in Position	2018-Present

Position	Chair, School Improvement Team
Organization	Cumberland International Early College High School
Years in Position	2019-2020

Position	Member, Instructional Cadre (PD)
Organization	Cumberland International Early College High School
Years in Position	2017-Present

Position	Cumberland County Distributive Leadership
Organization	Cumberland County Schools
Years in Position	2017-2018

### **Awards and Other Recognitions**

Award/Recognition	Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year
Year Received	2020

Award/Recognition	Burroughs Wellcome Fund Sandhill Region Teacher of the Year
Year Received	2019

Award/Recognition	Eglin Elementary Outstanding Educator
Year Received	2010

Award/Recognition	Gen. Patton Intelligence Officer of the Year, 436 <sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Dover AFB
Year Received	2000

Award/Recognition	436 <sup>th</sup> Operations Group Company Grade Officer of the Year
Year Received	2000