



New Mexico 2015 Milken Educator of the Year

Colin DeGroot

Teacher

The ASK Academy

Rio Rancho, NM

Subject(s) taught: Science

At ASK Academy, a small, independent nonprofit charter school in Rio Rancho that focuses on STEM innovation, Colin DeGroot makes science come alive by developing relevant, fun and powerful learning experiences for the students.

In fact, students "fight" to get into his class. His signature phrase is "Be an expert." Students own their learning.

DeGroot's overall goal is to show students why science matters and how it impacts their lives, and he is known for his Pyramid Teaching method. He asks students to become "experts" in specific areas of study and then share findings with the entire school. The method provides structure, direction and expectations around a concept. This technique allows for differentiation in learning styles and culminates in one final project with real-world significance that each student plays a major part in accomplishing.

For instance, students have built roller coasters, a rocket, a wind farm and carbon-dioxide-powered cars. In one class, students created a greenhouse that provided food for 40 people.

DeGroot's hands-on, research-based teaching style is a perfect fit for the unique school. He is a strong contributor to the learning culture at ASK, where he's considered a leader on campus. He heads the development of science curriculum and the school's project-based learning program. Staff often go to him for lesson suggestions and advice on teaching strategies.

On a broader level, DeGroot aids science and research educators across New Mexico as a Sandia National Laboratories fellow. He develops and leads a summer workshop series called POWER: Water and Energy Resources. Educators leave his workshop with relevant and innovative lessons to take back to their own students, multiplying the impact of DeGroot's teaching to an ever-widening circle.

He received a Bachelor of Science in secondary science education from the University of New Mexico in 2005 and a Master of Science Teaching from New Mexico Tech in 2011.