

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
Interactive Presentations (IP)

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THIS GENERATION'S SPUTNIK: ELIMINATING THE POVERTY ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN K12  
SCIENCE THROUGH THE USE OF SPACE SCIENCE EDUCATION

**Abstract**

The origins, evolution, and ultimate fate of our Universe are the perfect venue for STEM education reform—the “Sputnik” of this century to catalyze our youth to become globally competitive and globally cooperative at the same time. A case study of a middle school in Washington State, illustrates the dramatic improvement that results from not thinking outside of the box, but rather building a new box that incorporates secondary space education. The poverty achievement gap in the case study school was consistent over a six-year period, ranging from 32.1 percentage points to 27.0 percentage points (low income vs. non low-income student meeting standard on 8th grade state science assessment.) The gap for students at the school had also been consistent prior to the integration of high-level space science partnerships, ranging from 20.0 to 30.8 percentage points. More importantly, the STEM pipeline from K-12 to college is jeopardized. The science poverty achievement gap in K-12 education can be successfully addressed through the use of space science in preparing students for college and career readiness. Foundational elements include: the expansion of career and technical education (CTE) standards and experiences into science classes, year-long science professional development for teachers, astronomy research experiences for students and teachers that develop a lifelong passion for space science, space science mentors, and increased partnerships with families, community members, and STEM organizations. Authentic research experiences for students were supported by the inclusion of a year-long space science course with a focus on student research and opportunities for students to present their research at national symposia. Student-authored research includes microgravity experiments, sounding rocket experiments, galaxy composition analysis, lunar engineering designs, and Mars Lander engineering designs. Sustained partnerships with aerospace career role models provided real-world connections for middle school students. STEM mentors included representatives from Green River Community College, McChord Air Force Base, Pacific Science Center, the Museum of Flight, local STEM experts, graduate students from the University of Washington, high school STEM mentors, NASA scientists and engineers, astronauts, and more. In three years,

the 8th grade poverty science achievement gap narrowed from 29.8 percentage points to 0.5 percentage points. Washington State's gap during these three years changed little, moving from 28.7 percentage points to 27.1 percentage points. Qualitative data will be discussed along with additional quantitative data. Expansion of space science into multi-district district K12 systems will be discussed.