Meet Jackie

Scholar Spotlight: From STEAM Student to Educator & Mentor

🎤 Q: Can you introduce yourself?

👩‍🏫 **Jackie: I'm from Holland Patent, NY, and I graduated from Holland Patent High School in 2020. I attended MVCC, where I studied adolescence education (mathematics) and played tennis. After that, I transferred to SUNY Empire State University, where I completed my undergraduate degree in mathematics and earned my Master of Arts in Teaching.**

Currently, I am a middle and high school mathematics teacher. My passion for teaching was inspired by my incredible high school math teachers and my mom, who teaches high school science and absolutely loves her job!

You attended the Project Fibonacci Foundation STEAM Leadership Conference as a student. What initially motivated you to take part in the program?

My mom actually motivated me to attend! My high school wasn't really sending any students, but she was a facilitator and believed I would benefit from the experience. I attended in 2018 and 2019, and I was planning to return in 2020, but COVID happened. The conference was truly life-changing for me. I was able to make connections with professionals in the STEAM fields, discover my personal interests, and meet lifelong friends. It also helped me become a better student, improving my problem-solving skills, professionalism, and confidence—all of which have benefited me in my career.

Looking back, how did attending the STEAM Leadership Conference influence your academic and career path?

Initially, the conference inspired me to pursue engineering because I enjoyed problem-solving. But when I started college, I realized I wanted something more focused on mathematics and less on engineering and science.

One of the biggest influences was the high school teachers who supported scholars at the conference—Kevin Morrison, Tamalin Martin, and my own mother, Penny Mann. Seeing how engaged and passionate they were about teaching STEAM subjects made me realize that teaching was the right path for me.

I was also deeply inspired by John Urschel, a former NFL player and current MIT Math Professor. I was engaged in his discussion on mathematics and even got to interview him one-on-one. We're still connected on social media!

Now, as a mathematics teacher, you've brought your own students to the STEAM Women Rising Symposium. What was that full-circle moment like for you?

It was so special! I care deeply about my students, and it was amazing to see them experiencing the same inspiration that I did. They loved it! They also got a kick out of seeing photos of me from high school attending the conference—it made them realize just how much of an impact this program has.

You've not only attended these events but also served as a panelist at the STEAM Women Rising Symposium. How did it feel to transition from student attendee to mentor and role model?

Honestly, it was incredible! Watching students engage in the same workshops and activities that I once participated in felt surreal.

As a woman in STEAM, particularly in mathematics—a field often dominated by men—what challenges have you faced?

In my undergraduate math program, I was often the only woman in the room. It wasn't always easy to be part of group discussions, and sometimes I felt like my input wasn't valued.

Even now, as a young female teacher, I work with many male educators who have years of experience. It can be intimidating to speak up, but I remind myself that I bring a unique perspective—I have a different kind of connection with students and have grown up in a wildly different educational environment than veteran teachers.

To young women in STEAM, my advice is: Your perspective is valuable! Speak up, take space, and don't let anyone silence your voice.

Why do you think programs like the Project Fibonacci Foundation's STEAM Leadership Conference and STEAM Women Rising Symposium are so important for students today?

These events give students the opportunity to learn STEAM in a non-traditional setting. Instead of sitting in a classroom, scholars get to engage in real-world applications, discussions, and hands-on projects.

As a math teacher, I always get asked, "When will I ever use this?" Events like these answer that question—students get to see STEAM in action and apply their knowledge in meaningful ways.

If you could go back and give advice to your younger self when you first attended the STEAM Leadership Conference, what would you say?

Don’t be afraid to fail.

I was such a perfectionist in high school, and I struggled when things didn’t come easily to me. But failure is how we learn and grow. Put yourself out there, engage in conversations, and be willing to learn from others. It’s okay to be wrong—it means you’re learning!

What’s next for you?

I’m transitioning to a new school district to be closer to home and will be working more with middle school students.

I also plan to continue advocating for the Project Fibonacci Foundation. No matter where I go, I want to get more students and districts involved—because this program truly changes lives.

🌟 **Thank you for sharing your journey!**
Your story is an inspiration, and we can’t wait to see how you continue shaping the future of STEAM! 🚀💡✨