

“As teachers, we want to show them exactly what we are going to do. We tend to say, ‘This is what we are going to learn, and this is how we are going to learn it,’” Kennair said, “However, students will surprise you. From an early age, they are capable of coming up with creative ways to complete assignments. As I was seeing this in my classroom, I said to myself, ‘Let’s gear this towards STEM.’”

As her students’ passion for STEM grew, she saw a need to expand these classroom activities into an after-school program. With the support of her principal, and using knowledge from her volunteer efforts with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Barataria Terrebonne Estuary Program, and Audubon Nature Institute, Kennair creates lessons for the STEM Enrichment Program, providing students with project-based learning activities that build students’ awareness of STEM-based issues in their own community such as coastal preservation and recycling.



“Starting the conversation...makes all the difference. I am finding that many of my students are going to STEM-related events on their own in their personal time. They come to me with ideas for lessons, and I think this is phenomenal. The interest that I am seeing is genuine, and that is truly motivating.”

The response Kennair received to the after-school STEM Enrichment Program was overwhelming. Currently, the program enrolls 30 students, and three teachers lead lessons.

Kennair is already seeing a positive impact in her own community.

“This year during our beach cleanup, we had less to clean up, and this is due to having greater awareness now than we did five years ago about pollution,” she said. “Having background information on environmental education is paying off and will continue to pay off. There is evidence of this that is seen even in just cleaning up the beach. This awareness, just a little spark, can start a fire.”



How can you build awareness of STEM education at your school? Kennair shared with us these helpful tips:

-  **Reach out to fellow educators.**
Teachers are an amazing resource and can provide an incredible amount of support. Working with a group of educators that also share an interest in STEM will help start you off on the right foot.
-  **Use professional development opportunities to learn outside of your content area.**
Instead of going to professional development within your content area, venture outside of the box and attend a STEM session to learn how you can incorporate STEM into your lessons, regardless of grade level or content area.
-  **Use the internet.**
Go online! There are STEM resources everywhere.
-  **Find a STEM fest or event near you.**
There are many STEM festivals and events available throughout the state all year round. Attending a STEM-related event opens the door of opportunity and allows for networking.



*Lonnie Kennair
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