



Laura Akesson
Virginia Overdrive

“Teachers are the Spark”
General Session III, Saturday 1:00pm

Teachers defy Science. Think about it. Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth and Space Science - prefer stable states, and systems seek these states at lowest energies possible. When was the last time you thought of teaching and a classroom as naturally stable and low energy? Never. You are the pushers, the pullers, the cheerleaders, the creatives, the spark that ignites curiosity, motivation, wonder, and learning. This spark, and how we defy science and generate it, is the key to who we are and how we can light it up for our students...AND lead the way for our colleagues and communities. It was never my goal to organize professional development for my entire school, to found and lead an educational nonprofit, or to be interested in let alone write federal programs. But it's where my spark, used to ignite my students, has taken me. Where will your spark take you?

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Biography

Laura Akesson of Richmond, Virginia has taught Physics, Math, and Biomedical Engineering/Design for the past 22 years. Most recently, she is a '22-'23 Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow, serving in the Department of Energy. Leading up to that time, she was teaching AP and Honors Physics and Biomedical Design to students in grades 11 and 12 at The Steward School, in addition to serving as a Bryan Innovation Lab Liaison designing and delivering lessons and professional development for teachers in grades JK - 12. Her past teaching experience includes seven years in Henrico County Public Schools, two years in Zurich International School, and two years as an adjunct faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University. Laura holds a MS in Applied Physics from VCU, a BS in Mathematics and BA in Physics from the University of Richmond. During her years as an undergraduate student, she worked in an experimental particle physics research group at Jefferson National Lab. Her graduate work was in optical properties of semiconductors.

Laura defines herself as a perpetual learner, continuously making space for new connections and ideas; not only looking to experts, but to the great resource and potential that lies in students. In 2009, she founded **Science Overdrive**, a Virginia nonprofit aimed at inspiring, providing equipment for, and collaborating with Kindergarten - 8th grade Science teachers who in turn cultivate science enthusiasm for thousands of students. Laura also specializes in Systems and Design Thinking, sharing ideas that everything is connected: academic subjects, populations, societies, etc. Along these lines, she has been invited to the TEDx stage, the Department of Education, and the Federal Commission on STEM Education's subcommittee on Convergence Education. She has delivered talks about Science and Social Justice, at DisruptHR, among others.

Laura's primary joy is teaching and working for the benefit of all students and teachers. She has served on committees developing county-wide physics curriculum standards, state-wide STEM teacher professional development, and nationwide STEM programs. She feels lucky to infuse not only technical expertise into her lessons and products, but an artful fun that should be present in student learning.