



**FAST FACTS**

**Project title:** Continue the Vision

**Teacher:** Rachael Ibanez,  
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**School:** Preston Middle School

**Location:** Fort Collins, CO

**Website:** prestonmiddleschool.org

**Start/End date:** September 2012-May 2013. This is a semester long course (taught twice annually).

**Unique requests of participating mentors:** Mentors should have expertise, background, knowledge or interest in a student's identified topic of interest.

**Mentors provided by:** Agilent Technologies; Colorado Health Medical Group; Google; Hewlett-Packard Co.; MasterCard; Merck & Co., Inc.; Thomson Reuters

**Student expectations:**

- 1) Post bi-weekly email messages to their mentor throughout all stages of development
- 2) Take digital photographs of work in progress when possible
- 3) Create a presentation about their project highlighting results
- 4) Compile a journal portfolio related to their projects

**Contact:** David Neils,  
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**WWW.TELEMENTOR.ORG**

The International Telementor Program ■ David Neils, Founder/Director

## Preston Students Find Their Spark, Serve Others



**Students help preserve the past by writing about the lives of Parkwood Estates residents**

What's your passion? What's your spark? How could it help address a need in your community and help others?

Rachael Ibanez asks these questions of her 7th- and 8th-grade Gifted and Talented students, because she knows that when students discover and tap into their passions, they eagerly take steps to acquire more knowledge about them which translates into genuine learning.

With the help of professionals from several Fortune 500 companies who have similar interests or experience in a particular passion area, students design projects to ignite their sparks—to transform their passions from personal pursuits to meaningful ways to help others. In the process, they learn how to develop a timeline for their work, conduct indepth research, compile information, and create and give an end-of-project presentation to an authentic audience of experts, school faculty and their family members. Ibanez partners with the International Telementor Program (ITP) to match her students with professionals who volunteer as mentors.

“My students are asked to consider and explore one of their great passions to develop a culminating ‘Passion Project.’ Students are also asked to interweave their passion with a need in the community,” explains Ibanez. “I ask my students to channel their talents and passions to influence the world around them—sharing efforts, contributing in some capacity, tackling a social concern, spreading awareness, researching a problem, etc.”

As one should expect, Passion Projects are as varied as the students who design them. Projects range from establishing peer tutoring programs to working with older adults to write autobiographies, preserving their individual histories to curating a large public art exhibit that raised money to support special causes.



***“With mentors acting as a rudder, students are inspired to extensively conceptualize and reflect with intent. I have personally witnessed in these mentor relationships a consideration of authentic, worldly issues and applied problem-solving. Furthermore, many of my students are further motivated to do ‘real’ work based on the relational connection cultivated with their mentor. My students are energized to go the extra mile and have become intrinsically driven to become creative producers, rather than simply chasing the ‘A.’”***

**—Rachael Ibanez, Gifted and Talented Program Teacher, Preston Middle School, Fort Collins, Colorado**

One 7th-grade student, Palmer Tetley, vacationed in North Dakota the summer of 2012 and saw first hand the damage done when the Saris River in Minot flooded early that year. It impressed and concerned him so much that he developed a flood mitigation plan for the state and presented it to North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple and National Guard General David Sprvnczynatyk. Tetley’s presentation was covered by local media and can be seen on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/pLzvN-mv6p18>).

Ibanez believes this type of high-level, passion-driven learning could not occur if students did not receive support from mentors. “This collaborative program assumes the role of added assistance for teachers and students by offering up extra support. I have observed many of my students’ mentors encourage greater depth, complexity and sophistication of bigger, more purposeful ideas. With mentors acting as a rudder, students are inspired to extensively conceptualize and reflect with intent. I have personally witnessed in these mentor relationships a consideration of authentic, worldly issues and applied problem-solving. Furthermore, many of my students are further motivated to do ‘real’ work based on the relational connection cultivated with their mentor. My students are energized to go the extra mile and have become intrinsically driven to become creative producers, rather than simply chasing the ‘A.’”

While virtual relationships developed between mentors and students via email communication are effective, Ibanez feels they also can add a challenge to the mentoring process, especially for students who struggle to communicate in writing, perhaps due to a learning disability. She says, “students would benefit greatly from



**Artists create, show work.** *Students with artistic talent raise money for local nonprofits at art show*

a more face-to-face approach...I would love to expand Telementor’s reach and somehow offer local face time as an extended option in some areas.”

David Neils, ITP founder and president, agrees and “research shows that face-to-face mentoring programs can have a variety of positive impacts, but many top professionals believe they simply don’t have the time to make that kind of commitment. Approximately 80% of the professionals who sign up to mentor a student virtually through ITP have never volunteered in a classroom environment. By spending about 30-45 minutes per week communicating with students virtually, mentors can help students tackle real STEM issues, achieve academic excellence and explore career and educational futures. The vast majority of professional relationships these students will have as adults will be virtual.”



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