

2016 Cornerstone Award Inductee Fred Donelson

*“The Science Academy created amazing opportunities for our students.
The whole process was really special.”*

Fred Donelson, or Mr. D as he has been referred to by his students, has been an educator for 39 years, spending 31 at Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools. He taught everything from sixth grade general science, to high school biology, chemistry and physics. He spent his last eight years in Gahanna developing the GLHS Science Academy, offering specialized and high-level coursework for scientifically-minded students.

“Fred has been called a disruptively innovative educator by a former administrator, and that term accurately describes him,” said Rebekah Rice, gifted intervention specialist and honors English teacher, Gahanna Lincoln High School. “He impacts his students as learners, and also positively influences his coworkers.”

Donelson reflected on several things that made his 30 years at Gahanna special.

“I like the diversity at a school like Gahanna Lincoln, and the real-world experience that affords students,” said Donelson. “I taught every kind of kid imaginable – even my own daughters took my classes! There was so much creativity in the program, and wonderful leadership at the building throughout the years.”

One of his biggest accomplishments was developing and launching the Science Academy and curriculum pathway, finding a way to combine industrial arts skills with science and technology.

“I remember chatting with my colleague Don Weatherby,” said Donelson. “How could we combine academics and hands-on experiences? How could we maximize rigor, relevance and relationships?”

After attending a model schools conference, Donelson hit upon a plan and formula – and the rest they say is history! Students now have the opportunity to enroll in and explore space technology, underwater robotics, honors bionics, and special aspects.

“We were able to build relationships by having kids in science classes for multiple years,” Donelson said. “Before we established the academy, I rarely had students more than once. We created a ‘science niche’ and an advanced program that let them stay around for four classes.”

In addition to his tenure with Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, he has expanded his teaching repertoire in retirement to include classes at Capital University and stints abroad in China! “I still love teaching,” said Donelson. “Retirement affords me many exciting opportunities.” Donelson is a graduate of Otterbein College and The Ohio State University.