

# LAKE CITIES Living

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## Helping Her Students Reach for New Stars



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For students and teachers, nothing beats hands-on learning, no matter what the subject. So when Lake Dallas Middle School science teacher Olivia Stalnaker was chosen to participate in the NASA/IPAC Teacher Archive Research Program (NITARP), she knew she couldn't wait to get the Lake Dallas students involved.

"I'm sharing a professional paper about the project on Google Drive with students who are interested," said Stalnaker who attended the winter meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Grapevine. "This is a big deal for them to be privy to this. I didn't see a paper like this until college."

As part of NITARP, Stalnaker was assigned to a team of teachers and students headed by Dr. Luisa Rebull (IPAC). When Stalnaker met with her research team in December, they mostly discussed the parameters of the project and how it had been implemented in the past. They then dissected the paper making it easier to understand and, in turn, easier to explain to the students.

"This is high level stuff that we're working with," clarified Stalnaker who is sharing the paper with her current students as well as some of her former students. "This is far beyond normal 8th grade curriculum."

The paper illustrates the research that has already been done on a selected project. Stalnaker's team is charged with further studying a cluster of young stars in a region called Cepheus-C located in the northern hemisphere.

"We are focusing more narrowly on the analysis of this group of baby stars," said Stalnaker. "This year we will explore the objects observed using different data."

The group that analyzed these stars in 2016 primarily used data from the Spitzer Space Telescope. Stalnaker's group will use data from the Hershel Telescope and SCUBA (Submillimeter Common-User Bolometer Array,), an instrument located on a ground-based telescope in Hawaii, as well as other sources. There are two videos of the star formation along with the paper to aid in the research. Basically, they will be looking at the stars to further classify them using longer wavelengths of light.

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56°

clear sky  
humidity: 54%  
wind: 5mph NNW  
H 59 • L 52

70° 75° 70° 50° 50°  
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At this time, the teachers involved in the project are having a teleconference every Wednesday for about an hour to discuss questions and prepare a proposal that is due in March. Once the proposal is submitted, Stalnaker will host a weekly meeting with students interested in participating.

Stalnaker feels blessed to have the support of her principal at the middle school. "His attitude is rare," she said of Lake Dallas Middle School Principal James Parker. "He sees this as I do. It's a one-of-a-kind opportunity for our kids."

Stalnaker went on to explain that for Lake Dallas to have this opportunity, over many private and magnate schools, is an honor in itself. Very few middle school teachers are included in this program because Texas is one of the few states that teach the astronomy and the electromagnetic spectrum in 8th grade. Now these students have been given an opportunity to do actual research. Long story short, her students are getting exposure to something that could be life-changing.

In addition to being part of this research, Stalnaker will be taking two students to CalTech to work for a week on the project with her and her team. They will present their findings in January of 2018 at the American Astronomical Society meeting in National Harbor, Maryland.

"Every student I've met in this project talks about how much they enjoyed working as peers with their teachers," said Stalnaker. "That is exactly what we will be doing here at Lake Dallas Middle School. We will be learning together as peers."

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