

# Faculty Highlight



## Laura Whiteside

6th, 7th, & 8th Grade Teacher



**What do you teach at James L. Collins Catholic School and how long have you been teaching here?**

I have taught at JLCCS since 2008 and I teach Sixth Grade Science and World History, Seventh grade Life Science and Texas/US History, and Eighth grade Science and United States History.

**What college did you attend and what degree do you hold? Specializations?**

I attended Texas A&M University at College Station and graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Geography with an emphasis on Environmental Science. I graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in 1996 with a Master's of Science Degree in Agriculture with a Minor in Statistics. I also have a Special Education teaching certificate, and an English as a Second Language Supplemental endorsement.

**What motivates you each morning when you come to work?**

Working at JLCCS is rewarding because I wake up looking forward to interacting with students. It's exciting to see them working on activities in groups where they are learning about new concepts and discovering about the world around them. Our students have great leadership abilities and problem solving skills that are often "hidden" until they are put in situations that allow them to grow as students.

**Do you advise any extracurricular activities at the our school (including coaching)? If so, what? And why do you enjoy that activity?**

As club manager for the 4-H Discovery 4-H Club, I help plan the monthly meetings and help students with contests and projects throughout the year. We are making blankets to give to residents in a nursing home during Christmas. As advisor for National Junior Honor Society, we help with various school activities throughout the year and give the students opportunities to perform community service. I enjoy helping with these organizations because both allow students to become better leaders and examples for others to follow.

**How do you incorporate the 4 cornerstones into your daily classroom setting?**

It is important to me to encourage students to grow in their faith in Christ by integrating religion into the core subjects I teach, so they understand history and science from a Christian perspective that promotes morals and ethics. As students attend JLCCS, respect is encouraged throughout the day to teach students how to interact appropriately with one another, their parents, and other adults by teaching manners and classroom expectations. Our students also learn that integrity should be part of their thought process when deciding what is right or wrong and how to make good choices throughout their lives. Community Service is an excellent way for students to better understand how to be more involved with their community, church, and school. Last year, our eighth grade class volunteered once a week to help at the local food pantry

**What would your students be surprised to find out about you?**

I try to stay away from games on my phone because I have a hard time quitting a game, and I always want to get to the next level.

**What is one thing that sets your teaching method apart from other teachers at other schools?**

Teaching is not about what the teacher is doing, but what the kids are doing and if the activities they are engaged in will make them life-long learners. Teachers at other schools often want to teach this way, but because of time restraints and a scope and sequence that forces them to just "move on" and not truly teach to mastery or take time for the students to explore what they find interesting. I enjoy being able to teach in a way that allows students to investigate and discover, and every group of students is different in their interests.

**What is your favorite aspect about teaching at a Christian school?**

Attending mass once a week and being able to pray throughout the day make teaching at a Christian school unique and it has also helped me grow in my own faith journey. It's nice to be able to play Christian music in the background while students are working, or deal with problems in a way that helps students understand that God is always there for them throughout their day.

**Which event at the school do you look forward to and why?**

Although often bitter-sweet, I would have to say that our Eighth grade Graduation Ceremony at the end of May is always touching and special. Since it is a small school, I remember meeting and getting to know the students from a very young age. Watching them grow up, and then leave and come back to tell me about how they are doing in High School, and now even College- makes me understand why I am here, and not somewhere else.

**What advice would you give to your students to help them be more successful?**

When they leave the security of our school, it is important for them to know that even though they are in the world, they do not have to conform to the world. Choose the music you listen to and movies you watch carefully because these things do affect what you think and do. Also make especially good choices in friends and make sure they have they have the same Christian beliefs and value systems so what you have learned here at JLCCS will be with you for the rest of your life.