

# Akron Global Polymer Academy

**W**hen polymer scientist Carin Helfer walks into classrooms to talk about the art of polymers in science, students generally look amazed.

Dressed in a blazer and heels, and looking quite unlike the stereotypical scientist, Helfer sends the students a critical message the minute she walks in—anyone can be a scientist.

Helfer, in tandem with science educator Kathie Owens, is part of The University of Akron's Akron Global Polymer Academy, an online initiative created through the university and aimed at increasing interest in and aptitude for science education in Ohio schools.

Owens says the initiative started eight years ago courtesy of a grant from the state and has grown exponentially since then, establishing its online venue as a valuable science learning resource for educators from kindergarten to the 12th grade level.

In addition to the online site, located at [www.agpa.uakron.edu](http://www.agpa.uakron.edu), the academy offers a summer institute for educators to come learn firsthand the different science techniques offered in bite-size versions on the Web site.

"We're very proud of the work we've done in the summer institutes for teachers," Owens says, adding that its popularity grows every year, yielding twice



as many applicants as there are available spots in the programs.

Additionally, there's the work done in the classrooms: visiting schools and speaking to students and educators about how fun science can be.

"I started to hear about the fact that youngsters are not into [science], and I wanted to excite them about it, as well as being a scientist or an engineer," Helfer says. "Most school districts start dividing up math levels in about fifth

grade. Kids need to know early on the opportunities that are out there."

Owens says Helfer is invaluable in "cheerleading for science," as her affable nature and substantial knowledge on the subject allow educators to

see her as a colleague. "I'm so grateful I have a content specialist as passionate about science education as I am," Owens says.

Helfer says her experiences with students and educators are rewards in

themselves. "I enjoy knowing they see science as fun," Helfer says. "They're so appreciative—they seem hungry for this knowledge."