Growing up in the Bay Area, Erika Ebbel Angle was a science lover from an early age, winning numerous national science fair competitions for a six-year independent project she began as a middle school student in Hillsborough. After graduating, she moved across the country to attend MIT and was dismayed to read news stories about the waning interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), especially among young girls. What could she do to help reach students in elementary and middle school and keep a passion for science alive, she wondered.

The answer was Science from Scientists, a nonprofit she founded while still at MIT in 2002. Initially, SfS focused on getting elementary school kids excited about science through participation in science fairs (something close to Angle’s heart). It didn’t exactly take off like a rocket. “We had to beg and scrounge and operate in a very lean way in order to prove the concept such that people would believe in us,” Angle recalls.

Thanks to an unexpected detour—winning the title of Miss Massachusetts in 2004—Angle suddenly had the platform she needed to expand SfS’s reach and mission. Her new vision: a program that would send selectively chosen and trained (and, importantly, charismatic) scientists with advanced STEM degrees into classrooms to teach hands-on science lessons to kids in grades 3–8. The nonprofit currently partners with 76 schools in Northern California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota and puts emphasis on collaborating with each school’s faculty, following statewide education standards, and providing measurable results via student and teacher surveys. Its in-school programs served 9,000 students last year across the three states, and it has raised millions of dollars in funding.

SfS relies on frequent surveys of both students and teachers to ensure its approach is making a real difference. “Our students’ responses to our program are overwhelmingly positive,” notes
The goal of Science from Scientists is to ensure the nation’s youth is competitive globally in STEM fields through exciting, informative, and engaging training by practicing scientists. The lesson topics address many standards within the new Next Generation Science Standards, as well as other state standards.