

Mary Perry Smith

The MESA family has lost an early pioneer of the science, technology, engineering and math education realm with the passing of its co-founder Mary Perry Smith.

MESA began in 1970 with Smith and other visionaries, who wanted to develop academic and leadership skills and raise the confidence of California high school students historically underrepresented in engineering and other math-based fields.

While a teacher at Oakland Tech, Mary Perry Smith's concern for the lack of African American students taking advanced level math classes and her creative way of teaching, led to Tech become the first MESA school led by Smith. She worked tirelessly for decades furthering the MESA mission of higher education access in science, technology, engineering and math for underrepresented students. She became MESA's first director of programs at the Lawrence Hall of Science and was later named a board member.

Her commitment to students and foresight for their educational needs will always make her an inspiration.

Smith once said: "Students need someone who pays attention to them and encourages them, saying, 'you can do it,' and sticks with them all the way through. They need people who say, 'if this is where you want to go, then I will stay with you and help you learn the things you need to know to get there.' "

This philosophy is the heart and soul of MESA and has been the prevailing wisdom for more than 40 years. MESA began with 25 of Smith's students in Oakland. Her vision of STEM success for all students serves us even today now that MESA serves more than 28,000 elementary, middle school, high school, community college and university students throughout California.

