

NEWS RELEASE

One man's passion inspires the power of flight for local school kids

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Jaime Gates remembers the moment he knew he wanted to become a pilot. It was a summer trip in 1997, 12-year-old Jaime and his Boy Scouts of America troop got to tour New York's LaGuardia Airport. The up-close perspective of the aircraft made an ever-lasting impression on him.

"As soon as I went up to the air traffic control tower and watched the planes land and take off — I was hooked," he said. Today, Jaime works with 12-year-old (and younger) students in his free time to help them realize their dreams of working in the aviation industry.

He strives to inspire young people in his hometown of Brooklyn, New York, to soar to new heights by sharing his passion for aviation because he knows how access is the key to igniting the spark that can shape their futures.

Jaime pursued his passion for flying after he graduated college in Charlotte, North Carolina, continuing his journey into aviation at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. When the recession hit in 2008, Jaime knew he had to put his aspirations of becoming a pilot on hold to meet his financial needs. He decided to pursue a career in computer science for more immediate stability and joined American as a Customer Service Manager in 2011, giving him the opportunity to work in the industry he loves.

"I knew I wanted to be a pilot very early on, but there weren't many resources for me at the time," Jaime said. "I had no idea what path to take, and I didn't have a mentor to guide me on my journey ... that along with creating more financial stability is why I had to set my dreams aside."

Jaime's mother, Dr. Lena Gates, has been the principal of the Ronald E. McNair Public School 5 in Brooklyn for more

than 30 years. She was inspired to start an aviation program at her elementary school as she watched Jaime's love for aviation grow.

Jaime recalled sitting down with his mom and thinking through the barriers he faced in embarking on his own pilot career, wondering how they could better support students' journeys into aviation and what hurdles they could help flatten?

They started with access. If you can see yourself there, you can be there. "We begin to dream as early as elementary school," Jaime said. "So, if we provide the seed at the early stages of students' lives, they may plant their roots and grow a career in aviation."

At a management meeting in April 2022, Jaime and his fellow team members were called on by American Airlines leadership to be intentional and impactful by reaching out to underrepresented communities to search for its next generation of aviators.

"That's when the light bulb went off for me. I boldly asked if American would be open to supporting the aviation program at my mother's school," Jaime said. "Everyone was on board and wanted to get started immediately — and I was absolutely thrilled."

American Airlines Cadet Academy Cadet Jaime Gates has a passion for planes. Here he poses with aircraft at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

Jaime poses with his mother, Lena Gates, during the unveiling of the American-branded aviation program at McNair.

Jaime beams with pride for the partnership he helped create between American and the school.

In October 2022, the American Airlines Aviation Recruiting team and New York Flight office partnered with the Ronald E. McNair Public School 5 to rebrand the school's aviation center. American is helping the school expose its students to the power of flight at an early age and encouraging them to dream big.

"When the students look up, they see themselves represented around the classroom. And when they have questions, pilots from the American's New York Flight office frequently visit to provide mentorship and support them," Jaime said.

Jaime said the most important reason for connecting American Airlines to the school is to expose the students to a profession they might not see as available. "This career path has the potential to change generational recurrences

and the trajectory of many families in my hometown,” he said. “With the achievable pathway laid out by the **American Airlines Cadet Academy**, students can graduate high school and streamline into the commercial industry.”

After putting his dream on hold 10 years ago, the passion in the eyes of the students at his mom’s school reignited Jaime’s dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot. He applied and was recently accepted into the American Airlines Cadet Academy program. Now he’s back on course to live out his dream of becoming a pilot.

“It’s like all the stars aligned for me, and I’ve been on cloud nine from the moment I first approached American with the idea. To see American come into the classroom and help support my mother’s school and to now live out my own dream, it’s so special to see it all come together.”

His next goal is to focus on becoming a commercial pilot while continuing to give back to communities and expand his reach to surrounding areas that need support and mentorship.

Through the support of American Airlines, the program has reached new heights in its community and is paving the way for generational success. Watch the unveiling of the aviation center:



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