



# STEM SCHOOL

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

## STEM School: STEM Articles & Opinions: Policymakers Need to Increase Their Focus on STEM

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### POLICYMAKERS NEED TO INCREASE THEIR FOCUS ON STEM

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Posted: Sunday, January 26, 2014

For many years, educators and business leaders have talked about the importance of making sure that today's student body is on-track for higher-level education in the STEM fields. In Washington, D. C. this month, lawmakers met to commend STEM advocates for the progress they have made and to advocate for further changes.

The Research and Technology Subcommittee held a hearing on January 9th to explore the effects of STEM initiatives undertaken by businesses and nonprofits. The hearing included two panels. The first included four academics, nonprofit leaders, and business executives who spoke about the programs in which their particular institutions were involved. The second panel had the congressional committee interview three high school-aged students about their involvement in these programs

and the benefits that the students themselves saw. Overall, the meeting was productive and positive, and it led to the call from both Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) and Subcommittee Chairman Larry Bucshon (R-Indiana) to call for even further efforts to engage students at a young age with STEM so that they could continue this interest and excellence into college and beyond.

This committee hearing was not the only development in Washington this month. In the Senate, a resolution was passed to declare the last week of April 2014 "National Science and Technology Week" and to support the goals of the biennial USA Science & Engineering Festival. This bipartisan resolution was sponsored by Senators Kirk, Rockefeller, Alexander, Baucus, Crapo, Coons, and Durbin. The USA Science & Engineering Festival is the most massive conference of its kind, focusing entirely on developments in science, engineering, and other STEM fields with a goal of celebrating achievements and inspiring young people to further pursue education and careers in STEM fields. This conference plans to host 350,000 attendees, many of whom will be the students that policymakers are attempting to target for greater STEM benefits.

This increase in interest from national policymakers regarding STEM education and its importance is no small matter. However, there is still a great deal of distance that needs to be covered on the national policy front. With the important role that STEM education plays in both the future of American education and the preservation of American innovation, the United States cannot afford to have leaders who are only interested in STEM education for a quick sound bite or to articulate what is already known. While policymakers should be applauded for the steps they have taken in recent weeks to advance STEM education practices, even more time, energy, and money is needed to ensure that nationwide, STEM priorities are met. Currently, policymakers have no problem advocating and supporting private efforts to increase STEM engagement, but these efforts simply are not enough. More reform is needed if the STEM gap is ever going to be appropriately addressed.

The time to address these problems is now. The World Economic Forum released a report this month that stated that the United States now ranks 48th globally in the quality of our student's math and science education. This, coupled with the recent declines in United States standing on the international PISA tests for math and science, starts to paint a picture. There is concern in some corners that this will be the first generation since the dawn of American public education that will be less well educated than its parents were.

There is no single solution to this problem, but it does call for a national dialogue conducted by national leaders

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- What is STEM Education
- What About STEAM Education?
- Policymakers Need to Increase Their Focus on STEM
- Leaving No Child Behind in STEM Education
- Reforms Seek to Boost College STEM Degrees

who can implement national solutions. The STEM field functions on a global scale; America's students deserve the chance to receive the same caliber of STEM education no matter where in the country they reside. A major way that this is already being accomplished is through adoption of a set of Common Core standards. However, this approach is being resisted by many policy leaders who fear that it takes too much control away from local school districts. Instead of viewing it this way, it should be viewed as an opportunity for every community to make sure that its students are on par with their peers across the country.

Another area that national leaders could help improve the dialogue around STEM is through promotion. As a country, the United States needs to increase the focus it puts on the successes of scientists, engineers, and other STEM professionals to increase their visibility and appeal to students. However, this cannot just show the cooler things that STEM accomplishes; instead, it needs to highlight the pathways to greatness that STEM provides people from all kinds of backgrounds.

Much of the national dialogue focuses on regurgitating the problems that are already well-known: a shortage in qualified STEM workers, a student body that is grossly unprepared for collegiate level math and science work, educators who often are not trained in how to engage students in STEM from a young age, and a constantly evolving world that can be hard to pin down. But these problems serve as opportunities for the national leaders to rise and band together to solve one of the United States' most pressing problems. By having experts advise and having leaders provide leadership, STEM education can make faster, more universal progress with their help than it ever could on its own.

Last reviewed on: 01/26/2014



Parents Look to Boost College STEM Degrees

- STEM Debate is Generating New Ideas and Wider Acceptance
- Increasing Awareness of STEM in the General Public

### Recently Added STEM Schools

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Chula Vista, California  
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- Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology (GSMST)**  
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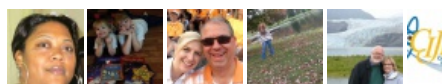
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