



**The STEM Education
Coalition**

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The STEM Education Coalition was founded more than 15 years ago with a mission to raise awareness in the U.S. Congress, the administration, and on the state level about the critical role that STEM education plays in enabling the U.S. to remain the economic and technological leader of the global marketplace in the 21st century. In this exclusive interview, we have had the pleasure of speaking with Lindsey Gardner, Director of External Relations for the STEM Education Coalition, who tells us about their mission to engage more stakeholders in working together to promote and support improvements in the way students learn about science, technology and engineering. She tells us that, 'as a non-profit organisation we currently have over 700 members across the country. Our members include Fortune 500 companies, teachers' organisations, professional societies, and a variety of other stakeholders. Our vision for the future includes more state-level engagement, as that's where many education decisions are made.'



Why do you think it's important for a broad range of people to join the STEM Education Coalition and what opportunities do you offer your members?

The diversity of our members is critical to our effectiveness. Each of our members brings a unique perspective on why STEM education is important to them and this has helped us to develop a more nuanced view of the policy landscape. Our members receive regular policy updates from our team, participate in meetings and briefings, and are key in shaping our policy agenda.

Why do you believe STEM education is important for the future of the U.S. economy and how are you working to raise awareness about the importance of supporting STEM education?

STEM jobs are growing faster than any other sector and our economy is only becoming more reliant on technology. Skilled workers who have the ability to thrive in a 21st

century setting will be essential if the U.S. is to remain the global leader in this sector. Furthermore, STEM education and high-paying STEM jobs have the promise of being a great equaliser when it comes to gender and race pay gaps.

We regularly engage with decisionmakers in Washington D.C. and on the state-level to discuss the importance of STEM education with them. We also have a robust social media presence, which we use not only to discuss policy, but innovative learning happening around the country.

How are you working to expand capacity and diversity in STEM education and the STEM workforce of the future?

The Coalition views expanding the capacity and diversity of the STEM pipeline as an essential component of developing a 21st century workforce. We have supported legislation to promote underserved groups joining the pipeline. We work to incorporate



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‘State and local education policymakers are trying to make innovative plans for the future, but it’s hard to plan when you’re unsure if your plans will be funded. Underserved areas could be hit the hardest.’



a variety of proven strategies, like mentorship opportunities, informal and out-of-school learning, hands-on activities, and advanced coursework, into STEM legislation to ensure high-quality STEM education is accessible to as many students as possible.

How are you working to influence policy and advocate for policies to improve STEM education? What current legislation are you most interested in supporting?

The STEM Education Coalition engages in a wide variety of public and behind-the-scenes actions to influence policy. These activities include regular meetings with key policymakers, hosting informational briefings for Capitol Hill staff, providing technical assistance for state-level advocates, tracking and monitoring legislation, and engaging with partner organisations.

We’re currently focused on making sure that any reauthorisation of the, ‘Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act,’

includes provisions that foster partnerships and collaboration between CTE and STEM courses. We are also actively involved in the implementation of the, ‘Every Student Succeeds Act,’ on the state-level and within the federal Department of Education.

Tell us about your informal education state advocacy toolkit?

The toolkit was developed through a partnership with the Afterschool Alliance, a member of our Leadership Council. We hope that informal education advocates will use the toolkit to engage with state and local policymakers at a deeper level about the importance of out-of-school-time for STEM learning.

What are your views on the current uncertainties in funding for STEM education in the U.S. and the potential impact for the future?

The current budgetary uncertainties have

put state and local education policymakers in a tough position. We believe that Title II and Title IVA of the, ‘Every Student Succeeds Act,’ should be funded as highly as possible within the congressionally authorised levels so states can continue to envision and implement a wide-variety of innovative STEM learning programs. Without these programs, states aren’t likely to have the ability to fund high-quality STEM learning at a sustainable level for the long term.

Finally, what do you see as the biggest challenge facing educators in STEM subjects over the next decade?

STEM must be embraced as a national priority and it’s unfortunately not on that level yet. On the K-12 level of primary and secondary education, we must embrace the emerging trends and best practices in learning. The nation must raise achievement in the STEM fields for all K-12 students both inside and outside the classroom, all across the country and in every community.