

Dear State Education Policymaker:

Our complex and changing world demands an adaptable workforce that is prepared to solve tough problems and come up with creative solutions to the challenges of tomorrow. Improving educational opportunities in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects will cultivate students' curiosity and creativity while teaching them to work as a team, base their reasoning on evidence, and solve problems through experimentation. Supporting high-quality STEM education for all children and youth is, therefore, vital to our country's social and economic prosperity.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted last year by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress, has established a number of new, flexible funding streams that state and districts can employ to support improvements in STEM education. In particular, we now have the ability to leverage the enormous potential of informal, out of school, and summer education programs to contribute to both academic and social measures of student success (such as critical thinking, teamwork, and perseverance). If we want to employ an "all hands on deck" approach to improving STEM, we must fully utilize these new learning pathways through the opportunities offered by our nation's primary K-12 education law.

Afterschool and summer learning programs around the nation have enthusiastically embraced STEM programming and are engaging children and youth in STEM learning—including those who may not otherwise be selected to, or choose to, participate in STEM programs. Research has demonstrated that high-quality out-of-school STEM learning programs are strong contributors to improving student engagement and learning in STEM fields.

To this end, our organizations call upon you to utilize the new state and district-level decision-making powers granted under ESSA to take action to employ afterschool, informal, and summer learning programs as an integral part of efforts to improve STEM education for all students.

Specifically, we ask you to take the following actions:

- Ensure that informal, afterschool, and summer education stakeholders have a seat at the table as formal representatives of the strategy and design teams formulating state plans under ESSA.
- Utilize the authority provided by the ESSA Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants Program (Title IV, Part A) to employ federal funding at both the state and district level to support programs that align informal, afterschool, and summer STEM learning with classroom-based STEM programming.
- Within requests for proposals issued for Title IV Part B (21st CCLC), call attention to new ESSA language that allows 21st CCLC to fund quality STEM programming in afterschool and summer learning programs; promote high-quality STEM programming by making use of the new flexibility to use Title IV Part B state-level

funds to provide subject specific professional development to out of school time program staff.

- If your state has a state-wide strategic plan for improving STEM education, strongly recommend that it contain strategies to integrate informal, afterschool, and summer learning pathways into those efforts. If your state does not yet have such a plan, strongly recommend that it develop one.
- Encourage your state's Members of Congress to support full funding of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

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Spending time in programs outside of school that focus on STEM subjects gives all students the opportunity to experiment with STEM ideas in real-world situations. Such opportunities help spark curiosity, especially for those who might not think of themselves as "math and science kids." Additionally, out-of-school opportunities are particularly well suited to sparking interest in STEM and building identity as a STEM learner. The success of our youth in today's ever-changing and high-tech society stands to be greatly improved by taking advantage of the complementary nature of formal and informal learning opportunities, which includes after-school and summer programs. We all benefit when more of our children have a fair and equal chance to live up to their potential and contribute to our society.

*The afterschool STEM Hub is a collaboration among afterschool leaders and stakeholders to provide coordinated messaging and communications that impact advocacy and policy and help ensure the important place of afterschool programs in the STEM learning ecosystem. It is led by the Afterschool Alliance and generously supported by STEM Next, an initiative launched by the Noyce Foundation. For more information (including the list of participating organizations), please visit [afterschoolstemhub.org](http://afterschoolstemhub.org).*

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- Afterschool Alliance
- American Chemical Society
- American Society for Engineering Education
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- American Statistical Association
- Association of Science-Technology Centers
- Aviation Technician Education Council
- Education Development Center
- *FIRST*
- Girls Inc.
- Hands on Science Partnership

- Ithaca College
- National Afterschool Association
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Consortium of Secondary STEM Schools
- National Girls Collaborative
- National Summer Learning Association
- Oregon AfterSchool for Kids
- PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience (McLean Hospital & Harvard Medical School)
- Society of Women Engineers
- STEM Education Coalition
- The Connector
- Vermont Afterschool, Inc.
- YMCA of the USA