AFTERSCHOOL STEM HUB

Crafting a well-framed message about informal, afterschool and summer learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

Four things to keep in mind as you make the case for STEM

1. Spell out STEM!

The public is largely unfamiliar with the STEM acronym, so take time to list the interconnected subjects, especially during your first mention or at the beginning of communications.

- *As our nation/state/community sets out to improve learning, an important focus must be updating the ways we teach science, technology, engineering and mathematics—the subjects called "STEM."*

2. Say why STEM learning matters to society (early in your communication)

How you begin any piece of communication shapes how everything that follows will be interpreted. This is why you always want to begin your communications with an explicit statement about why STEM learning matters. Focusing on either "*shared prosperity"* or *"future preparation"* can work well. You can even use them both!

- ***Shared prosperity****.* The interconnected content areas of science, technology, engineering and math—the subjects called "STEM"—give us the building blocks for understanding and improving the systems that power our economy and advance our society.
- ***Future preparation****.* Given our complex and changing world, we will need citizens who are critical thinkers and problem-solvers to meet our modern challenges. Learning in science, technology, engineering, and math—the subjects called "STEM"—builds the knowledge and skills needed to reason through tough problems and come up with creative solutions.

3. Make sure to explain how afterschool STEM learning works (throughout your communication)

The public often doesn't have a clear understanding of what engaging, hands-on learning looks like in practice. Use explanatory metaphors to help communicate why STEM matters to those who are not involved in the educational process firsthand.

- ***Activation****.* Afterschool and summer programs spark learning by letting children and youth experiment with science, technology, engineering and math, or "STEM," in real-world situations. They activate interest and spark curiosity, especially for those who might not think of themselves as "math and science kids."
  Fluency*.* Just as people need to be immersed in real-world situations to learn a language, children and youth need to explore science, technology, engineering, and math—the subjects called "STEM"—in their lives outside of the classroom to fully understand and become fluent in these subjects. Out-of-school learning offers the time and experience that help children and youth become fluent in STEM.

4. Devote attention to communicating solutions

Use the "*charging stations"* metaphor to position afterschool, informal and summer learning programs as integral partners in efforts to improve STEM education for all students. Show how these programs offer states and districts opportunities to employ Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funding to support improvements in STEM.

- ***Charging Stations****.* Learning opportunities are like charging stations, available at multiple times and locations, where young people can power up to take an active role in their learning. Schools must be strong and reliable charging stations, but informal learning contexts are also important outlets for students to plug in and charge up throughout their weeks, weekends and summers. These informal learning opportunities include afterschool and summer programs, science centers and museums, community organizations, and clubs. To supercharge the learning of the next generation, we can add power to these programs outside of school that focus on STEM subjects.

The Afterschool STEM Hub is led by the Afterschool Alliance and is a collaboration among afterschool leaders and stakeholders who seek to ensure that afterschool programs are considered a key component in the STEM learning ecosystem. We provide research-based coordinated messaging and advocacy tools to help advance policy efforts around the country. The project was initially funded by the Noyce Foundation and has continuing support from STEM Next, an initiative of the Center for Education Policy and Law at the University of San Diego. For more resources and information (including the list of participating organizations), please visit ***afterschoolstemhub.org****.*