

# STEM Sell

American business leaders agree: Science, technology, engineering and math learning is the key to our nation's future prosperity



It doesn't take a science, technology, engineering or math (aka STEM) whiz to know which way the wind blows—but, as in most things these days, it doesn't hurt, either. STEM learning is the high-octane fuel for the engine of innovation in the U.S. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, five years from now nearly all of the 30 fastest-growing occupations will require quantitative skills and technical STEM knowledge.

Numbers like these, and more generally the challenges facing U.S. businesses around STEM learning, led to the formation of Change the Equation (CTEq), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, CEO-led initiative that serves as catalyst and counsel to the business community as it works to improve the quality of STEM learning in the U.S. Today, 100 members now connect and align their philanthropic and advocacy efforts to have far greater impact than they would on their own: Via CTEq, one might say  $1 + 1 > 2$ .

The CTEq coalition is helping to lead and influence the STEM learning movement both inside and outside the classroom. This is happening in several ways, from developing tools to promote more effective collaboration among STEM stakeholders, to creating communication channels grounded in data, to speaking as a unified voice while still respecting state and local autonomy. Among CTEq's goals are to overcome minorities' underrepresentation in STEM: At present, students of color make up 31 percent of the population but receive only 15 percent of college degrees and certificates in STEM fields.



## Fundamental to business

It may not have been called STEM at the time, but CTEq member AT&T's long history of support for related education dates back to the founding of AT&T Labs in 1925. "It's fundamental to our business—everything from technology innovators to laying fiber-optic cable and customer-service reps who explain our mobile technology to customers," says Beth Shiroishi, Vice President, Sustainability and Philanthropy, AT&T (above). "The 'skills gap' issue directly impacts the future success of AT&T and all American business. We must act now to develop a robust pipeline of skilled workers to remain globally competitive as a company and a nation."

To that end, AT&T and the AT&T Foundation have given more than \$97 million to support STEM initiatives since 1987. STEM is likewise an important focus of AT&T Aspire, the company's \$350 million investment in education to help more students graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

Developing STEM skills in young people is critical, but keeping students in school is the first hurdle. Annually, more than 1 million U.S. students fail to graduate high school with their class. "Obviously, that has huge implications for our company, the economy and our nation's global competitiveness," Shiroishi says. "That's why we've incorporated STEM into our investment in AT&T Aspire."

One main goal is to excite young people about the link between STEM studies and a successful career. AT&T's commitment to bringing more women and underrepresented minorities into STEM professions drives many of its collaborations. The company is working with GameDesk to bring high-quality digital games and learning technologies to students, educators and parents. AT&T also recently collaborated with WITI—Women in Technology International on a "hackathon" (left) where women developers created mobile apps designed to improve student success rates.

"Women hold only 25 percent of all STEM jobs in the U.S. It's vital that we raise that number," says Cathy Coughlin, AT&T's Senior Executive Vice President and Global Marketing Officer. "We're simply missing out on all of the great ideas and perspectives they bring to the table." ●



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