

## The chamber case for afterschool STEM

Preparing students for the jobs of the future requires early, industry-focused investment to be effective. As research continues to show the academic and social benefits of afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) learning, chambers of commerce and the businesses they represent are beginning to take notice.

Afterschool and summer STEM programs offer unique opportunities to raise awareness about STEM career paths and enable youth to start developing the technical skills they need to succeed in the workforce. Business communities that work to support afterschool STEM learning opportunities will gain a competitive edge in an increasingly global and technological economy.

### Why STEM?

According to a [report](#) published by the U.S. Department of Commerce, STEM fields are expected to grow 8.9 percent by 2024, compared to 6.4 percent for non-STEM occupations. Employers are already feeling the pinch of the “skills gap” as jobs remain vacant due to underdeveloped workforces. To get ahead of the changing workplace, communities must supply students with STEM abilities that will enable them to perform the changing, highly-skilled jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

STEM education also provides students with skillsets beyond the traditional STEM fields. With STEM education being [linked](#) to deeper learning skills like critical thinking, communication and collaboration, these learning opportunities ensure students have the tools to be effective employees in any industry. Additionally, STEM degree holders earn [higher salaries](#) than their peers, regardless of whether they work in STEM or non-STEM occupations. Providing students lifelong opportunities to engage with and get excited about STEM increases their chances of success, no matter what paths they pursue.

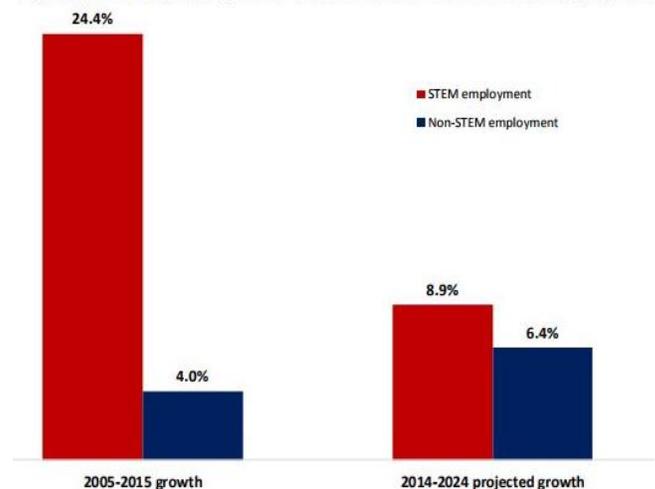
### Why afterschool?

Kids spend less than 20 percent of their waking hours in the classroom. Afterschool programs can nearly [double](#) their opportunity to learn, explore and tinker with STEM topics. As knowledge about the field has expanded through past decade, [research](#) continues to indicate that high-quality afterschool programs increase academic performance and engagement in students.

#### Quick Facts

- U.S. [STEM](#) employment grew 24.4 percent over the past decade compared to 4.0 percent for other professions.
- The more students participate in afterschool STEM learning, the more interested they are in [STEM subjects](#), degrees and career paths.
- On average, STEM degree holders earn [12 percent](#) more than non-STEM degree holders.

Figure 1. Recent and Projected Growth in STEM and Non-STEM Employment



Source: Noonan, R. STEM jobs: 2017 update. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/stem-jobs-2017-update.pdf>

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Afterschool opportunities have also been shown to reduce students' likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, dropping out of high school or being disciplined at school.

Additionally, these programs are an important support network for working parents. More than eight in ten parents of children who participate agree afterschool programs help them keep their jobs, and 85 percent agree that afterschool programs give them peace of mind and helps them focus at work.

Supporting afterschool opportunities for youth will not only help meet future workforce demands, but has the potential to impact bottom lines today.

## What can chambers do?

The role that chambers play in supporting afterschool STEM varies in different organizations. Chambers can partner with key stakeholders to support year-round STEM opportunities in the following ways:

- **Partnerships** – Work with community stakeholders to encourage collaboration and a shared understanding of community needs
  - Contact your state's Statewide Afterschool Network to understand what role your chamber can play
  - Work within partnerships to drive workplace relevance of existing programs
- **Policy** – Provide the business community's perspective on federal and state policy discussions related to funding for afterschool programs and quality childcare
- **Member Engagement** – Engage the business community to have an active role in shaping their future workforce
  - Talk with member businesses about the importance of supporting afterschool STEM through policy, partnerships and programming
  - Work with chamber members to offer STEM-related internships or work-based learning experiences
- **Programs** – Incorporate STEM into education and workforce development programs
  - Find ways to incorporate STEM into existing out-of-school time chamber programs
  - Develop new chamber-led programs such as STEM immersion experiences, competitions, and workshops that engage the local business community and incorporate STEM learning

### Key actions

- Advocate for the benefits of afterschool STEM among local businesses.
- Discover what afterschool STEM programs are already offered in your community, and whether there is a role your chamber can play.
- Advocate for policies that provide quality afterschool programs to youth.
- Partner with afterschool programs to drive workplace relevance in their programming.
- Find ways to incorporate STEM into pre-existing chamber programs.
- Work with chamber members to offer STEM-related internships or work-based learning experiences.
- Connect with other chambers of commerce who have worked on afterschool STEM to discuss best practices.

Thank you to our afterschool STEM supporters:



For samples of chamber engagement in afterschool STEM, click [here](#), or contact Emily Counts 703.998.3521 or [ecounts@acce.org](mailto:ecounts@acce.org)