



The STEM Action Center

Getting the Private Sector Involved in Their Future Workforce

Guest Commentary by Stan Lockhart

Problem Statement

In the 117 year history of Utah, there has never been a more important time to increase student proficiency in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Facing us is a serious talent shortage with thousands of high-paying jobs waiting to be filled. At the same time, there are over 600,000 school-aged Utah children who could be prepared to fill these jobs.

With strong backing from Governor Herbert, the Utah Legislature unanimously endorsed a bold, innovative plan using widely-used best practices that have proven successful around the world. Utah created a STEM Action Center with \$10 million to get started and close two glaring achievement gaps; Jr. High School Math proficiency and college Math readiness.



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The most compelling argument for the STEM Action Center was the overwhelming outcry from industry that Utah must have better prepared graduates. It wasn't optional for employers; it

was essential. The future success or failure of Utah businesses depends on it.

Overview of the STEM Action Center

A STEM Action Center is first and foremost a place where the business community, public education, and higher education can come together and solve problems. Utah is home to incredibly talented people, and getting the right resources focused on the right problems can generate significantly better outcomes.

Second, this Center will seek out best practices in STEM education for consideration here in Utah and create a robust best practices database that can be easily searched and used by administrators, teachers, students, parents, and others.

Third, the STEM Action Center will help identify and close achievement gaps in order to help students better comprehend subject material. The goal is to use proven, time-tested methods, technology and training to increase student achievement. This is a prime function of the Center.

Last, our STEM center will promote STEM related career fields and help students see the opportunities that exist to

literally "change the world" and to earn more money.

Transparency and accountability are embedded into the requirements of the STEM Action Center. Results must be released twice each year to the Legislature and once a year to the State Board of Education. There is heightened interest and a sense of urgency on the part of policy makers to see the STEM Action Center succeed and future government investment will depend on current success.

Outcome Goals

The immediate outcome goals are to increase student achievement in Jr. High School Math and reduce college math remediation. But there is much more.

By 2020, Utah's Governor Herbert has challenged the education community and the business community to get 66% of our population between the ages of 25-35 to have post-secondary degrees or certificates.

In order to do so, several outcome goals have been identified that must be achieved including:

1. 90% College Math Ready (currently 66% system wide)
2. 90% Entering Post-Secondary Education (currently 68% of graduates)
3. 90% Graduating from High School (currently 78% of students)
4. 90% Proficiency in K-12 in STEM (currently mid-40% to mid-70%)

Conclusion

We now have a unique opportunity to align Utah's educational outcomes with workforce needs. If successful, Utah will be poised to compete for tomorrow's jobs in a fast-changing world. The STEM Action Center can make all the difference in the world for our children.

Optimism abounds that in a STEM Action Center, Utah has found a best practice vehicle to higher student achievement. As the STEM Action Center succeeds, businesses will have a qualified, trained workforce, higher paying jobs will be the norm, and students will gain the necessary skills to compete in a global economy.

These are goals worth fighting for. These are goals worth investing in. We invite you to support and contribute to the success of the STEM Action Center. Your participation matters.