



Afterschool: Seize the Opportunity for Enriching STEM Education

Mrs. BOXER: Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the great work that afterschool and summer learning programs in California and across the country are doing to engage children and youth in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Afterschool and summer programs are a vital part of our country's education tapestry. They provide engaging, hands-on learning experiences that stimulate student interest, develop crucial skills, and drive home the relevance of STEM to our daily lives. Out-of-school learning opportunities help children develop the academic and life skills, such as problem solving and determination, which are crucial in STEM fields. Additionally, these programs provide key opportunities for mentors and role models to engage with children.

High-quality afterschool STEM learning programs are having a significant impact on the young people who participate in them. A recent study shows participants in afterschool and summer programs have improved attitudes toward STEM fields and careers, increased STEM capacities and skills, and a higher likelihood of graduating from higher school and pursuing a STEM major in college.

One of these exemplary programs is the Woodcraft Rangers program in Los Angeles, California. Woodcraft Rangers exposes middle school students to cutting-edge STEM activities, including robotics. This highly engaging program allows students to configure high tech robotics, enhancing their STEM skills, unlocking their imaginations, and exposing them to real world problem solving situations. Afterschool and summer programs are uniquely positioned to deliver valuable enrichment activities like robotics that help children gain valuable creativity, critical thinking, and team-building skills.

In addition to programs that serve children and youth directly, organizations such as the Afterschool Alliance are working to advance policies, research, and partnerships so that all children can access rich STEM education experiences through out-of-school programs.

Private companies are also embarking on efforts, such as Time Warner Cable's Connect a Million Minds (CMM) initiative, to promote youth interest and performance in STEM fields during out-of-school time. Businesses like Time Warner Cable know that investing in STEM education now, helps ensure a robust workforce in the future. And they know that afterschool, summer and other out-of-school programs are key venues for students to develop the problem solving, team building, and creative thinking skills necessary for a strong STEM workforce.

I applaud the afterschool and summer learning programs, advocacy organizations, and community partnerships across the country that are working to advance our students' STEM achievement, and our country's future through enriching out-of-school learning. To support the work of these organizations, I hope that the Senate can come together to reauthorize the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program — the only federal program dedicated to supporting afterschool and summer learning.