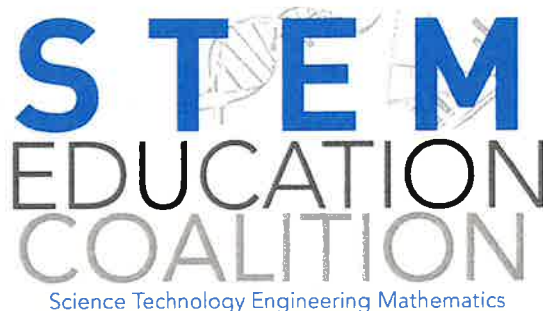




May 20, 2025

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations

Dear Appropriations Leaders,

The STEM Education Coalition, representing a broad alliance of educators, industry leaders, and advocates dedicated to advancing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, writes to express our profound concern and frustration with the first round of "Skinny Budget" details for the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Budget Request released by the White House. While we recognize the transitional nature of a "Skinny Budget," the proposed \$1.454 trillion discretionary funding blueprint glaringly omits STEM education as a national priority and includes cuts to critical federal education programs that will have a chilling effect on educators, students, and the future of STEM innovation in the United States.

STEM education is the backbone of America's competitiveness in a global economy increasingly driven by technological advancements in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing. The budget's emphasis on maintaining funding for AI and quantum research at key agencies is commendable, yet it fails to acknowledge that the pipeline for researchers, engineers, and innovators begins at an early age in our classrooms as well as informal learning environments. We share the administration's stated commitment to strengthening U.S. economic competitiveness and bolstering our workforce for the industries of the future, which is why it is perplexing to see proposals that would dramatically reduce the very federal investments that have long served as the backbone of American innovation and talent development. By neglecting to prioritize STEM education, the Administration risks undermining the very workforce needed to achieve its stated goals of maintaining U.S. leadership in these critical fields. The absence of explicit support for STEM education programs signals a troubling disconnect between the Administration's technological ambitions and the educational foundation required to sustain them.

Our greatest concern lies with the proposed consolidation of 18 Department of Education K-12 grant programs into a single funding structure, as outlined in the Revitalizing Federalism Fact Sheet. While streamlining administrative processes may reduce costs, the elimination of targeted STEM education grants—many of which support teacher professional development, curriculum development, and hands-on learning opportunities—threatens to dismantle proven pathways for engaging students in STEM. Programs like the Department of Education’s Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants have been instrumental in equipping teachers with the tools to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. More than 90% of afterschool programs funded by Title IV, Part B 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants now offer STEM learning that excite and engage young people in these fields in ways that complement school-day learning. The budget’s characterization of these programs dismisses their broader impact on fostering inclusive, high-quality STEM education for all students, particularly those from underserved communities who are critical to diversifying the STEM workforce.

The proposed \$5.2 billion cut to the National Science Foundation (NSF) further exacerbates our concerns. NSF’s Directorate for Education and Human Resources supports transformative STEM education initiatives, including the Discovery Research PreK-12 program, the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE) initiative, and the Advancing Informal STEM Learning program. These programs fund evidence-based practices that enhance STEM teaching and learning, from early childhood through higher education. The science education research that NSF funds provides critical infrastructure to the STEM education field – it has yielded insights into effective program design as well as how to document and measure program impact; innovations to test new professional development models that can reach rural educators; exploring community-centered interdisciplinary approaches to program implementation; and so much more! The budget’s elimination of NSF grants deemed “speculative” or focused on “niche social studies” overlooks the interdisciplinary nature of modern STEM education, where social and environmental contexts are integral to preparing students for real-world challenges. Cutting these investments will discourage innovation in STEM pedagogy and limit opportunities for students to engage with cutting-edge research, particularly at institutions serving underrepresented groups.

The ripple effects of these cuts will be felt most acutely by educators and students. Educators rely on federal funding to access professional development in STEM disciplines, where rapid advancements demand continuous learning. Without robust support, educators will struggle to deliver engaging, up-to-date instruction, leaving students ill-equipped to succeed in the modern, technological economy. Reduced funding for programs like the STEM Master Teacher Corps, which incentivizes and trains high-performing STEM educators, will hinder efforts to address the nationwide shortage of qualified STEM teachers. For students, the loss of access to hands-on STEM experiences—such as robotics competitions, coding bootcamps, and science fairs supported by federal grants—will stifle curiosity and limit exposure to STEM careers. This is particularly detrimental for students in rural and low-income communities, where federal programs often bridge resource gaps that local budgets cannot fill.

The budget’s focus on workforce development through the Make America Skilled Again initiative, while promising, does not adequately address the foundational role of K-12 STEM education in preparing students for apprenticeships and technical careers. The proposed 10 percent allocation of workforce grants to apprenticeships is a step forward, but it cannot replace the early, sustained STEM exposure needed to spark interest and build skills. A 22.6% reduction in non-defense discretionary funding, including education, will starve schools of the resources needed to maintain

modern STEM facilities, update curricula, and provide broad access to advanced coursework like computer science and engineering.

Moreover, the budget's narrative, particularly in the Cuts to Woke Programs Fact Sheet, unfairly targets existing programs that were specifically authorized and appropriated by Congress to broaden participation in STEM fields. The STEM workforce faces persistent underrepresentation of women, Black, Hispanic, and Native American professionals. Eliminating programs that address these disparities will widen existing gaps and weaken the talent pool needed for national security and economic growth. A diverse STEM workforce is not a distraction—it is a strategic imperative.

We urge Congressional appropriators to reject the proposed cuts to STEM education programs and restore funding to levels that reflect their critical role in America's future. Specifically, we recommend:

- **Preserving Targeted STEM Education Grants:** Maintain funding for Department of Education programs like Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants to support teacher training and student engagement in STEM and Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is critical to supporting the growth in STEM programming offered to low-income youth across the nation outside of schools.
- **Protecting NSF's Education Investments:** Reverse the \$5.2 billion cut to NSF, ensuring continued support for STEM education research and broadening participation initiatives.
- **Enhancing K-12 STEM Infrastructure:** Allocate funds to modernize STEM facilities, provide access to technology, and expand advanced coursework in underserved schools.
- **Supporting Teacher Development:** Reinvest in programs like the STEM Master Teacher Corps to recruit, train, and retain high-quality STEM educators.

The STEM Education Coalition stands ready to work with Congress, the Administration, and other stakeholders to advocate for robust federal investment in STEM education. We cannot afford to shortchange our students at a time when global competitors are doubling down on STEM. By prioritizing education in the FY26 appropriations process, Congress can ensure that the United States remains a leader in innovation, security, and economic prosperity.

Sincerely,



James Brown
Executive Director
STEM Education Coalition