STEM EDUCATION COALITION

STEM Education & National Security

The Case for STEM Education in the FY27 National Defense Authorization Act

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ROADMAP FOR TODAY

What We'll Cover

What Is the NDAA?

A quick primer on the bill, the process, and why it's different from other legislation.

Why Advocates Watch This Bill

The NDAA's track record makes it one of the most reliable vehicles in Congress.

STEM Education as National Security

Why a defense bill is talking about K-12 classrooms and teacher pipelines.

Our FY27 Asks

Two concrete wins-in-progress: language in the House and Senate reports.

What's Next & How You Can Help

Where the bill stands, and how students can get involved right now.

But First, Pop Quiz!

Who is the largest employer of STEM professionals in the United States?

a) Boeing
b) Nvidia
c) Amazon
d) Google
e) STEM Education Coalition
f) Other

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Science Technology Engineering Mathematics

Answer?



What Is the NDAA?

The National Defense Authorization Act is the annual bill that **sets policy and authorizes funding levels** for the Department of Defense — produced jointly by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Policy, not just money

It authorizes activities and sets defense policy across dozens of titles — from procurement to personnel to cyber.

A joint product

Drafted separately by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, then reconciled in conference.

A growing footprint

Originally about hardware and personnel, it now regularly touches workforce, education, and emerging tech.

NDAA vs. APPROPRIATIONS

NDAA	APPROPRIATIONS
Authorizes policy & funding levels	Provides the actual dollars
Armed Services Committees	Appropriations Committees
Sets the “can-spend” ceiling	Writes the check
Enacted every year since 1961	Passed annually, often via CR

How a Bill Like This Moves

WE ARE HERE — JUNE 2026

1 — Budget Request
President submits request (Feb)

→

2 — Committee Markup
HASC & SASC mark up separate bills

→

3 — Floor Votes
House & Senate each pass their version

→

4 — Conference
Differences reconciled

→

5 — Enacted
Signed into law (target: Dec)

House Armed Services Committee approved its FY27 bill in early June; the **Senate Armed Services Committee** released its report just last week.

This is exactly the moment for advocacy: report language is drafted, but the bill isn't final. Floor votes and conference are still ahead — meaning our asks can still be reinforced, defended, or strengthened.

Why This Bill Is an Advocacy Magnet

66th

consecutive year an NDAA is positioned to be enacted, dating to 1961

No other major authorization moves this reliably, year after year, regardless of which party controls Congress.

It's must-pass

Troop pay, force readiness, and weapons programs ride on it — Congress treats it as non-negotiable.

It's bipartisan by design

Defense policy draws support across the aisle even in gridlocked years.

It's a vehicle for outside priorities

Because it always moves, committees use it to carry policy well beyond traditional defense jurisdiction — including STEM education.

It's predictable

An annual cycle means a recurring, known window to raise our priorities — not a one-time ask.

“A robust, clearable STEM workforce is a national security requirement.”

— Echoing the House Armed Services Committee's framing in its FY27 report



Cleared Workforce

DoD and the defense industrial base both struggle to attract and retain talent who can hold a clearance.



Industrial Base

Munitions production and shipbuilding capacity depend on a steady pipeline of technical talent.



Tech Modernization

Drones, AI, and cyber warfare all demand a deeper bench of STEM-trained Americans, starting in K-12.

DEEP DIVE · ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI Is the Next National Security Frontier

An Official DoD Priority

In January 2026, the Department of Defense ordered an “AI-first” acceleration strategy, directing every service to field AI across warfighting, intelligence, and enterprise operations.

A Global Race

Military advantage increasingly hinges on which nation can develop, field, and trust AI fastest — not just who has the most compute.

A Persistent Talent Gap

DoD competes with private industry for AI engineers and data scientists, and the security clearance process adds months of delay — slowing how fast new capability gets fielded.

THE STEM CONNECTION

Every pace-setting AI project the Department launches needs cleared, AI-literate talent.

That pipeline doesn't start at the Pentagon — it starts in K-12 classrooms, computer science courses, and the regional STEM ecosystems this bill already targets.

Already in our asks: the Senate's FY27 report names artificial intelligence directly as a reason to sustain K-12 STEM investment — this slide makes that case in full.

Ask #1: Scale Regional STEM Ecosystems

HOUSE FY27 NDAA REPORT

> *The committee recognizes that U.S. national security depends on a robust, clearable STEM workforce... The committee is aware that regional STEM ecosystems exist across the United States and bring together education, industry, government, and community partners to develop talent pipelines aligned with regional workforce needs. The committee believes these ecosystems may provide a scalable model to support coordinated workforce development efforts aligned with defense industrial base requirements.*

THE DIRECTIVE

Directed to: Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition & Sustainment

Due: Briefing to House Armed Services Committee by December 31, 2027

1. Identify regional STEM ecosystems that could support DoD and defense industrial base workforce needs
2. Assess how those ecosystems could be leveraged for those workforce needs
3. Recommend a pilot effort to leverage and scale them — including implementation and resource considerations

Ask #2: Sustain DoD K-12 STEM Investment

SENATE FY27 NDAA REPORT *Released last week*

> *The committee is encouraged by recent Department of Defense efforts to invest in [STEM] education for K-12 students. Students studying STEM will become the core of the workforce that the Department needs to serve our military installations, increase production of munitions, and modernize the industrial base... Therefore, the committee urges the Department to retain this investment in STEM education as a foundational part of this modernization effort, particularly efforts with a strong evidence base, including teacher professional development in geographies with military-connected families.*

KEY THREADS

Munitions & industrial base

STEM students are framed as the future production and modernization workforce.

Drones, AI & cyber

Explicitly named as the warfare domains this workforce must be ready for.

Evidence-based, targeted

Calls out teacher professional development in military-connected geographies by name.

OUR MESSAGE

STEM education isn't just a classroom issue.

It's a national security readiness issue.

That's the case Congress itself is making in the FY27 NDAA — and it's the case we carry into every meeting on the Hill.

SECTION 5 · WHAT'S NEXT

Where Things Stand Right Now

House Armed Services Committee approved its FY27 bill

Includes the regional STEM ecosystems briefing directive (early June 2026)

Senate Armed Services Committee released its report

Includes the K-12 STEM investment language (last week)

Floor votes in both chambers

Still ahead — language can shift during floor amendments

Conference committee

House and Senate differences get reconciled into one final bill

Enactment

Target: before the calendar year ends, continuing a 60+ year streak

SECTION 5 · WHAT'S NEXT

How You Can Help, Starting Now



Tell your story

Share how STEM education shaped you with your Member of Congress — personal stories move offices more than statistics.



Plug into the Coalition

Use the STEM Education Coalition's advocacy toolkit and resources to find your entry point.



Watch for recess

August district meetings are prime time to raise these provisions face-to-face with staff.



Track the conference

Follow the House-Senate conference this fall — that's where final language gets locked in.

Thank You

Questions, partnership ideas, or want to get more involved?

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Take Action!! Visit the STEM Education Coalition Action Center: https://www.stemedcoalition.org/take-action