

September 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education and Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Leaders:

As the Congress considers policy priorities for the American Families Plan reconciliation package, the STEM Education Coalition urges your committee to include priorities and investments to support science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in postsecondary education and workforce development programs within the committee's jurisdiction. Below, we outline a series of policy recommendations that reflect the views of our diverse alliance of education, business, and professional organizations and our shared interests in STEM education.

Our complex and changing world demands an adaptable workforce that is prepared to collaboratively reason through tough problems and come up with creative solutions to the challenges of tomorrow. STEM educational opportunities cultivate students' curiosity and creativity while teaching them to work as a team, base their reasoning on evidence, and solve problems through experimentation. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the important role STEM education plays in our economic, public health, and national security interests, and it must be a priority for our students to gain the critical thinking abilities and other transferrable skills offered by STEM to be prepared for the unknown challenges and opportunities of our future. As such, education in STEM must be elevated as a national priority by crafting policies to drive innovation and adapting federal spending priorities. The reconciliation bill is a prime opportunity to meet these priorities. The following recommendations are based on the Senate Democratic [memorandum](#) for broad policy areas targeted under the FY 2022 Budget Resolution.

Increase the Maximum Pell Grant Award

The Coalition urges the committee to leverage Pell grants to bolster the STEM pipeline and encourage traditionally under-resourced populations to pursue degrees in STEM fields. Specifically, we recommend the committee to:

- Increase the maximum Pell Grant award and expand Pell grant eligibility for high-quality, shorter-term education and job training and certification programs that support STEM career pathways¹; and
- Leverage Pell grants to support students' pathways to completion at a four-year institution in a STEM fields. The committee should also provide increased funding for programs dedicated to postsecondary student success, such as the TRIO program.

Workforce Development and Job Training

The pandemic has underscored the need for Congress to update and invest in federal policies that help Americans reenter the workforce and adapt their skills to build a more sustainable and equity economy. It is clear the economy of the present and future is overwhelmingly STEM dependent. The Coalition urges the committee to:

- Provide a one-time investment in career and technical education programs and Labor department workforce development programs with a priority on STEM pathways;
- Provide employers with less than 500 employees a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for each paid STEM intern employed;
- Provide employers with less than 500 employees a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for each new STEM apprentice, \$3,000 for a STEM mid-career or unemployed apprentice, and \$5,000 in the case that a STEM apprentice is hired by the company for at least a year following the Department of Labor approved apprenticeship²; and
- Provide direct funding for small and medium-sized businesses to set up "returnships" for qualified talent within in-demand industries within the STEM workforce³.

¹ JOBS Act (Kaine/Portman and Levin/Gonzalez)

² STEM K to Career Act (Swalwell)

³ RESTART Act (Rosen/Hyde-Smith and Houlihan/Baird)

School infrastructure, student success grants, and educator investments:

The Coalition supports robust and sustained investments in STEM education infrastructure and preparing and retaining new teachers, at both the elementary and secondary levels, to be skilled in STEM pedagogical content knowledge so that they can generate strong student learning and excite students about pursuing STEM careers, including targeted efforts to promote STEM subject master teachers and teacher specialists. Specifically, this includes:

- Investments Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants and Supporting Effective Educator Development grants with a priority on STEM educators;
- Investments for LEA's and afterschool programs to provide effective in-depth professional development for current and future STEM educators;
- Federal loan forgiveness for STEM elementary and secondary education teachers; and
- Permanently extend the \$250 tax credit for teachers' school supplies and adds an additional tax credit for STEM education supplies for teachers of up to \$250.

Specific to school infrastructure, the Coalition urges the committee to:

- Provide investments for schools to build modernize, renovate, or repair STEM classrooms and science labs with a priority on Title I, rural, and native K-12 schools, career and technical education programs, community colleges, and MSI's and TCU's⁴.

Investments in HBCUs, MSIs, HSIs, TCUs, and ANNHIs:

The Coalition urges the committee to support comprehensive efforts to expand the capacity and diversity of the STEM postsecondary education pipeline, including targeted initiatives to promote the inclusion of underrepresented minorities, women, and other high-need populations in STEM fields with investments in HBCU's, MSI's, TCU's and ANNHI's. Specifically, we urge the committee to:

- Provide a one-time substantial increase in funding for the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program (MSEIP) at the Department of Education;
- The Coalition encourages the committee to provide significant investments to institutions of higher education to build and modernize research infrastructure and provide student researcher wrap-around supports to retain and bolster the STEM researcher pipeline with a priority on HBCU's, MSI's, HIS's, and ANNHI's that disproportionately serve underrepresented populations in STEM; and

⁴ INSPIRES Act (Schatz)

- Provide increased funding for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) broadening participation programs for minorities and other under-represented groups in STEM.


Federal Funding for Community Colleges:

The Coalition urges the committee to prioritize STEM education pathways in community college investments, specifically by:

- Prioritizing STEM fields as eligible fields of study for front and last-dollar financing options to cover 100% of costs leading to a two or four-year degree at an eligible community college;
- Providing funding to support pathways for community college students to pursue advanced degrees in STEM fields; and
- Providing funding to eligible community college institutions to establish public-private partnerships or a collaborative with STEM employers.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views and we look forward to working with you and your staff closely during the consideration of the reconciliation bill. For further information please contact me at (202) 400-2192 or jfbrown@stemedcoalition.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Brown III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

James Brown
Executive Director
STEM Education Coalition