Questions for School Programs

The DC STEM Network has created a tool to empower all parents and educational advocates in making informed decisions about their students’ participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs. Here are guiding questions for parents and guardians to use as they explore STEM opportunities for their students.

These questions are available for parents to ask principals, administrators, and/or teachers, to help make an informed decision for their students’ participation in STEM programming. For more information or to find a STEM program, event or resource, check out www.dcstemnetwork.org.

Recommended Questions:

- What percentage of graduates enter college with the intention to major in a STEM field?
- Does the school have a STEM program? If so, what are the specific requirements?
- Does the school have any partnerships with STEM organizations, businesses, or colleges?
- In what manner are the students exposed to a variety of STEM experiences and careers? Does this include opportunities for internships in STEM fields throughout the summer or school year?
- Does the school offer Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in STEM subjects, or provide students with additional opportunities to earn college credit in STEM subjects?
- Is a project based learning curriculum prioritized in STEM classes and how does this differ from “hands-on” STEM learning?
- What opportunities exist for teachers to remain current with STEM content and pedagogy, and how are they supported by the school to deepen their knowledge of the Next Generation Science Standards or other appropriate standards?
- Does the school provide diverse opportunities for students to connect with STEM professionals?
- Does the school have its own STEM Fair and/or provide the opportunity for students to enter projects into the annual citywide STEM Fair?
- Does the school have any STEM-centered extracurricular activities?
- Does the school have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
Questions for STEM Enrichment

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Recommended Questions:

- How does this program connect to the STEM learning taking place in my student's school?
- What diverse STEM opportunities does this program offer?
- How does this program involve “real world” STEM professionals?
- Does this program utilize STEM mentors? If so, in what way?
- What is taken into consideration when designing and implementing this program?
- How does this program connect my student to current “real world” STEM topics or issues?
- What specific STEM knowledge and/or skills will my child have after participating in this program?
- Are there any opportunities in this program for my child to earn STEM-related certifications or college credits?
- Are there opportunities for internships, jobs, or scholarships associated with this program?
- How does this program incorporate supplemental STEM resources such as online content, field trips, hands-on experiential learning, and STEM-related fairs?
- Does this program have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
DC STEM Network Parents’ Guide: Middle School

School Programs

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Recommended Questions:

- What percentage of students enter a STEM focused high school?
- Is participation in summer STEM enrichment programming encouraged?
- What percentage of students successfully complete Algebra I before middle school graduation?
- Does the school have any partnerships with STEM organizations, businesses, colleges or STEM professionals?
- How are students exposed to a variety of STEM experiences and careers?
- How much time per week, on average, are project-based learning lessons prioritized in STEM classes?
- What opportunities exist for teachers to remain current with STEM education, and are they supported by the school to deepen their knowledge of the Next Generation Science Standards?
- Does the school provide diverse opportunities for students to connect with STEM professionals?
- Does the school have its own STEM Fair and/or provide the opportunity for students to enter projects into the annual citywide STEM Fair?
- Does the school have any STEM centered extracurricular activities?
- Does the school have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
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Recommended Questions:

- How does this program connect to the STEM learning taking place in my child’s school?
- What STEM opportunities does this program offer?
- How does this program involve “real world” STEM professionals?
- Are there any opportunities for my child to earn STEM-related certifications through participating in this program?
- Does this program utilize STEM mentors? If so, in what way?
- What is taken into consideration when designing and implementing your program?
- How does this program connect my child to current “real world” STEM issues?
- What specific STEM knowledge and/or skills will my child gain through this program?
- How does this program use STEM to encourage my child to work with other students?
- How does this program incorporate STEM resources (i.e., online content, field trips, STEM-related fairs, etc.)
- Does this program have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
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Recommended Questions:

- On average, how often do students engage in hands-on STEM activities per week?
- Does your school have partnerships with STEM organizations, businesses or STEM professionals? Do these partners help teachers with STEM projects or visit classrooms?
- How often do the students learn about STEM careers either from field trips or visits to the classroom by STEM professionals?
- How often do teachers attend STEM professional development or training?
- Are teachers given time to plan lessons together?
- How often do your students have opportunities to explore the outdoors (e.g. a school garden or environmental centers)?
- How often do the students visit museums or science and nature centers in the DC area?
- Does the school have its own STEM Fair and/or provide the opportunity for students to enter projects into the annual citywide STEM Fair?
- How does the school communicate with families about what students are learning in STEM?
- How does your school help parents support classroom STEM learning at home?
- Does the school have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
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Recommended Questions:

- How does this program connect to the STEM learning taking place in my child’s school?
- How do you ensure that the learning is fun and age-appropriate?
- How does this program engage “real-world” STEM professionals?
- How does this program connect my child to current “real world” STEM topics or issues?
- What STEM knowledge and/or skills will my child gain through this program?
- How does this program use STEM to encourage teamwork?
- How does this program use supplemental STEM resources such as online content, field trips, hands-on learning, and STEM-related fairs?
- Are there opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in this program? If so, in what way?
- Does this program have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
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Recommended Questions:

- Is STEM taught through hands-on experiences in the classroom? If so, how often?
- How does your school help parents support classroom STEM learning at home?
- How often do your students have opportunities to explore the outdoors? For example, does your school have a garden that is used for instructional purposes?
- How often do the students visit the museums or science and nature centers in the DC area?
- How does the school communicate with families about what the students are learning in STEM?
- Does the school offer STEM enrichment programs either after school and/or during the summer?
- Does the school provide out-of-school resources for early STEM learners?
- Does the school have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.
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Recommended Questions:

- What opportunities are offered in this STEM enrichment program that are not found in traditional daycare or after-school care programs?
- How do you ensure that the learning is fun and age appropriate?
- How does this program connect my child to current “real world” STEM topics or issues?
- What knowledge and experience will my child gain from participating in this program?
- Are there opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in this program? If so, in what way?
- Does this program have recommended STEM resources that parents can use if the child wants to explore further?
- How does this program use STEM to encourage teamwork?
- Does this program have accommodations for students with special needs or English Language Learners? If so, please explain.