



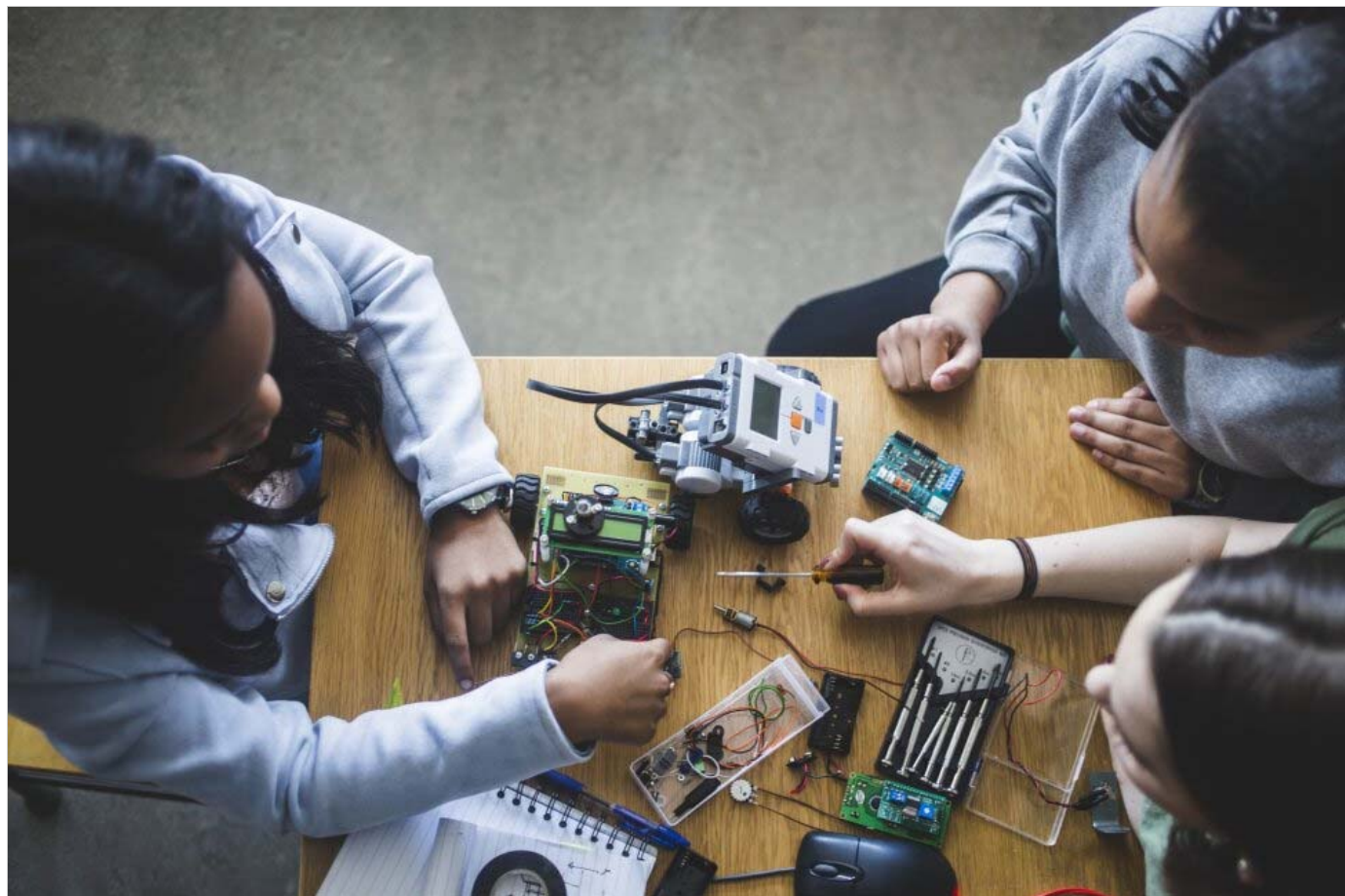
EDUCATION

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Why Choose a STEM Private School?

STEM schools are not for every student, but they can help with college admission.

By [Barbara Armijo](#) | Sept. 17, 2021



STEM schools, public and private, can help meet that need by fostering STEM skills early. Often, that means long before high school. (GETTY IMAGES)

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what is available in most public systems.

“By nature, these schools have a curriculum that is more specific and more specialized,” says Zak Harris, a former university admissions officer who serves as Assistant Director of College Counseling and Communications at InGenius Prep, which helps students improve college applications.

“While a more traditional school may offer [AP Calculus AB](#) ... STEM-based schools may offer linear algebra or a seminar in differential calc,” he wrote in an email. “Their physics classes may delve into actual engineering topics or they might have classes dedicated to research, giving their students opportunities to learn various statistical methodology and software to conduct their own projects.”

Is a STEM private school worth examining for your child? Education experts say that largely depends on his or her interests and aptitude, but that STEM-oriented options seem to be increasing alongside rising workforce needs.

“Parents are looking to get the best education for their children,” says Joanna Severino, owner of PrepSkills, a private tutoring company that connects parents with private and independent schools and universities. “Most private schools take a holistic approach to education, meaning it’s rare to find a school that concentrates only on STEM fields. But private schools that concentrate heavily on math and science as the backbone of their curriculum are certainly gaining prominence.”

STEM Jobs Are Booming

Schools that emphasize math and science, and later technology and engineering, began sprouting up in the early 2000s to better prepare students for high-skill, high-wage careers in technology and related fields.

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The National Science Foundation estimates that 80% of the jobs available during the next decade will require math and science skills. STEM jobs are projected to grow by



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While STEM jobs are growing, America's ability to train people for those jobs and keep pace remains an open question. Two members of Congress, writing in [HR Magazine](#) in 2019, said the U.S. will need to fill roughly 3.5 million STEM jobs by 2025.

How STEM Schools Help

[STEM schools](#), public and private, can help meet that need by fostering STEM skills early. Often, that means long before high school. At [Northshore Christian Academy](#) in Washington, for example, engineering coursework begins in early grades. All students gain hands-on experience programming, with at least one unit of coding at every grade level.

"STEM schools provide students the ability to develop intellectually at a rapid pace," says Akbar Rahel, admissions director at Prep Expert, a company that helps students prepare for college testing and application.

"This is a key point separate and apart from the college admissions process or career planning – students are simply learning advanced material," he wrote in an email.

"Many of the students I work with are already imagining innovations and are sincerely motivated to discover new ideas."

Private STEM schools often have enhanced facilities, such as laboratories, and advanced equipment such as 3-D printers, laser cutters and other tools. STEM schools may also have an edge when it comes to qualified teachers bringing real-world knowledge to the classrooms. Teachers often have advanced degrees and industry experience in the subjects they teach. This all matters, Severino says.

"The admissions process is daunting, but if a student gets in, there is value to the tuition dollars being paid to that school for quality classrooms, labs and experienced teachers," she says.

Often, it is not cheap. While there are certainly STEM schools in public systems – [Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology](#) in Virginia, which had the highest average SAT scores in the country in 2019, is a good example – many are



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Is a STEM School a Good Fit?

When looking at a STEM school, education experts say it is best to be realistic about a child's interests and strengths. For example, middle school students getting B grades in math and science may not be the best fit for a STEM-focused high school.

"One goal of the high school journey is to bring out the best in every student, from academics to extracurriculars to volunteering and research," Rahel says. "Quite simply, a STEM career may not be the choice for many kids inclined toward the humanities and social sciences. There are countless kids who dream of becoming lawyers, judges, authors, poets, journalists, diplomats, economists – a wide range of amazing career options."

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Of course, grades are not everything. Admissions experts say even students who excel in math and science should have a deep interest in those subjects in order to consider a STEM school.

"It must go beyond a strong transcript," Harris says. "The student will need to have a dedicated interest outside of the classroom as well, likely spending time reading about these areas and showing a curiosity that other students don't have."

Rahel says students must be self-motivated. "The rigor of classes is simply too intense if a student is not serious about putting in a solid effort, day in and day out," he says.

Impact on College Admissions

Many admissions experts say studying at a STEM school can be a substantial advantage when applying to college.

"Many STEM schools also offer advanced classes in the humanities and social sciences," Rahel says. "Many of my students from top STEM schools also complete



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"There isn't a set path someone who loves STEM has to take," Harris says.

"Most students don't attend a STEM-based school and have success in college and beyond because of the experience they had," he says. "I truly believe that the student's desire to take advantage of the opportunities they have is the real difference maker."

A Sample of STEM Schools

For parents who want to explore private schools that are well-known for STEM education, here is a sample from around the country:

- **Basis Independent Silicon Valley**, in Sunnyvale, California, serves children in transitional kindergarten through 12th grade. Students in grades six through eight spend 7.5 hours each week on biology, chemistry and physics.
- **The Harker School**, in San Jose, California, is a coeducational school serving children in grades K-12. The school is more than 100 years old and has a 100% college, university and conservatory acceptance rate.
- **Harvard-Westlake School**, in Studio City, California, is an independent college preparatory school for grades seven through 12, located on two campuses in the Los Angeles area.
- **Phillips Academy Andover**, in Andover, Massachusetts, is a coeducational boarding and day school that has operated for more than 240 years. Students hail from 51 different countries.
- **St. Mark's School of Texas**, in Dallas, is a nonsectarian college preparatory day school for boys in grades one through 12 that has operated for more than 100 years. Nine out of 10 students took an Advanced Placement test this year and 74% earned a score of 4 or 5.

Searching for a school? Explore our [K-12 directory](#).



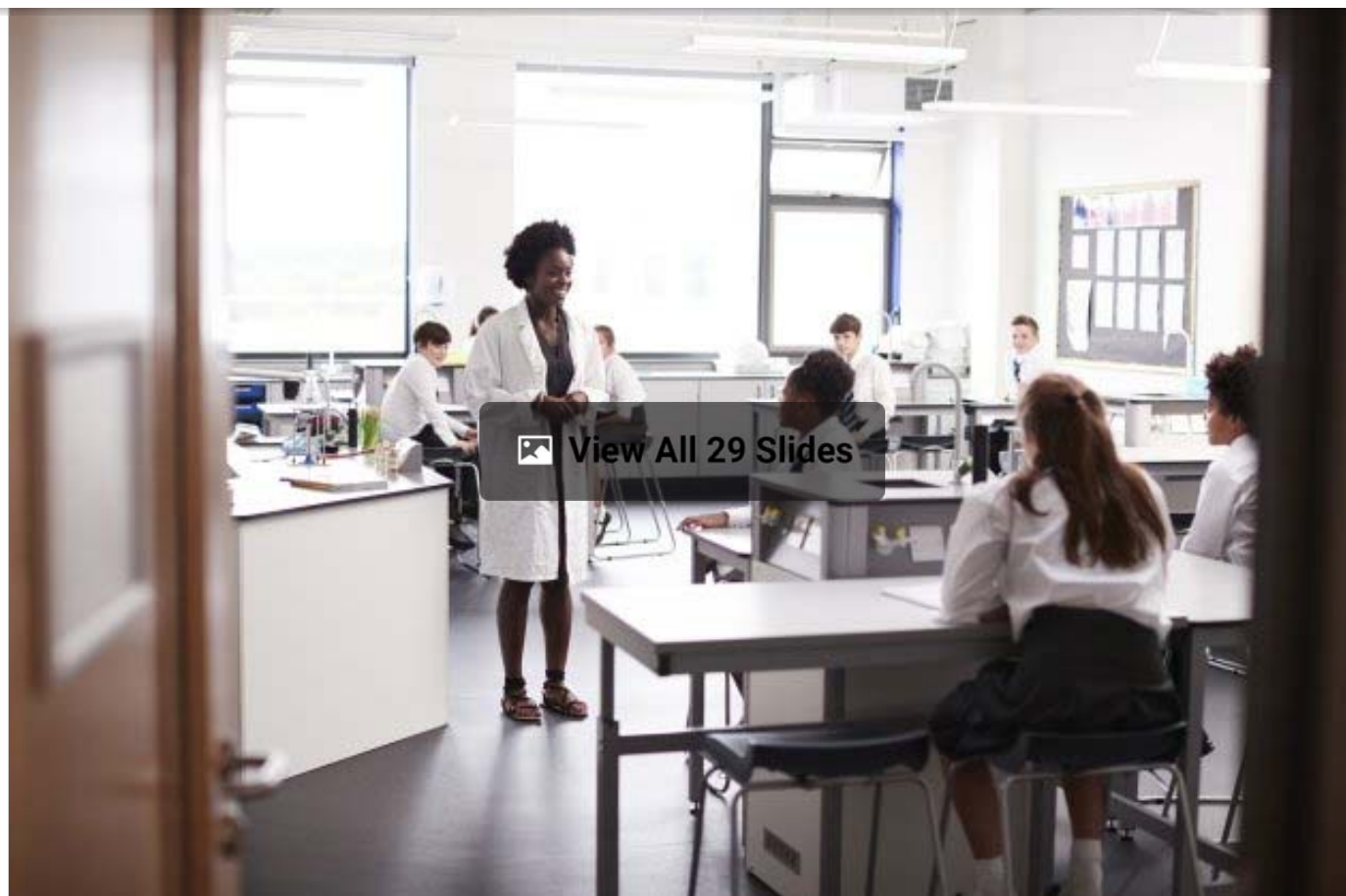
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