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# Just Talking to Kids About STEM Boosts Tests Scores

3 weeks ago Gina Belli Career Advice 0

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Advances in technology are changing the economy, and that's affecting the jobs that are available for workers. However, STEM jobs (jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) have a secure future in the modern job market. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that STEM-related employment opportunities will grow to about 9 million from 2012 to 2022.



Image Credit: asiseeit/Getty Images

No matter how secure and lucrative these paths may be, not everyone is interested in pursuing them. However, a new study published last month in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has found that just talking with kids about STEM can help spark an interest.

to change their children's minds or help them be motivated," Christopher Rozek, a post doctoral scholar at the University of Chicago, and one of the study's lead authors told *UChicagoNews*. "This research shows that parents can still have a substantial effect."

"By the time students are teenagers, many parents don't think there is much they can do

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Let's take a closer look at a few of the key takeaways from this research.

### 1. Exposure to information changes the way students view STEM jobs.

How do we get more students interested in STEM? It turns out that just telling them about why science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are important makes a big difference.

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For this study, researchers prepared materials that were designed to help parents discuss the relevance of STEM work with their children. Outcomes were then tracked over the course of several years. Ultimately, researchers found that the group that was given the materials were more likely to be interested in pursuing STEM careers than the group that was not. These students also reported having a more favorable impression of the field. And, they were more likely to take STEM courses in college.

## 2. Building this understanding also has an impact on student performance.

Not only did this study find that students who were exposed to information about the importance of STEM fields were more interested in studying these areas, it also found they were better at the work itself. Researchers observed that students who had this exposure scored 12 percentage points higher on the math and science ACT, on average, than their peers who weren't presented with the materials.

## 3. Parents can help their children score the jobs of the future.

Researchers have projected that as many as 47 percent of today's jobs will be made obsolete in years to come by artificial intelligence. But, that doesn't mean that kids have a bleak employment future to look forward to.

Technology has the potential to create more jobs than it destroys. The future of work may be changing, but today's students can prepare by carefully considering the fields that are likely to grow. Their parents can help.

"Parents are potentially an untapped resource for helping to improve the STEM motivation and preparation of students," Rozek told *UChicagoNews*. "We could move the needle by just encouraging parents to have these conversations about the relevance of math and science."

## Tell Us What You Think

What made you decide to work in STEM? We want to hear from you! Leave a comment or join the discussion on Twitter.

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**Gina Belli**

Gina Belli works as a teacher, freelance writer, and educational consultant, and lives in her beloved home state, Connecticut. She likes to write about education, work-life balance, and the economy. Given her arresting capacity to over-analyze anything interpersonal, her writing often tends to focus on some of the more emotional aspects of workplace connections and disconnections, as they relate to partnerships and teams, personality and communication styles, and leadership. In her free time, she likes to putter

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