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## **Idaho's unfilled STEM jobs double in three years**

BOISE, Idaho (Jan. 13, 2020) — The number of unfilled STEM jobs in the state continues to grow, according to the Idaho STEM Action Center's budget request presentation before the state Legislature's Joint Finance Appropriations Committee today. However, agency officials said the number of computer science teachers and students grew dramatically over the last year.

“The number of Idaho's unfilled STEM jobs continues to climb, rising from 3,813 in 2016 — the first year we tracked it — to 7,633 in 2019,” Dr. Angela Hemingway, the STEM Action Center's executive director, said. “This represents a huge loss to Idahoans, amounting to \$516 million in lost personal wages and \$27 million in lost state tax receipts in 2019 alone.”

Meanwhile, she said the agency's Computer Science Initiative gained significant momentum between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years.

“The STEM Action Center does substantial work preparing teachers to be able to instruct computer science by providing them with training and resources through a variety of initiatives,” Dr. Hemingway said. “As a result, Idaho saw an 11 percent increase in the number of teachers teaching computer science classes.”

Idaho saw an even bigger increase in the number of students taking C.S. courses.

“Overall, the number of students taking computer science classes leapt 18 percent from 48,195 during the 2017-18 school year to 57,079 during the 2018-19 school year,” Dr. Hemingway said. “Idaho's constitution calls for free, uniform, and thorough public education and this clearly demonstrates we are providing more equitable access to underrepresented populations in STEM, including rural communities and female students. In fact, during this same timeframe the number of girls taking computer science classes surged 22 percent.”

She said the improved computer science numbers are encouraging.

“In education circles, computer science and coding are increasingly being referred to as ‘the fourth R’ — reading, writing, arithmetic, and algorithms — because computers and technology are such an integral part of everyday life,” Dr. Hemingway said.

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The STEM Action Center is part of the Executive Office of the Governor, and per Gov. Brad Little's recent budget recommendation it is asking for an appropriation of \$6,149,700 for fiscal year 2021, which begins July 1, 2020. This represents an 8 percent increase compared to the agency's fiscal year 2020 appropriation of \$5,668,400. However, Dr. Hemingway said the increase represents spending authority rather than cash, but it will allow the agency to continue to secure funding via grant writing and fundraising.

The agency established the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation in 2017 to help fund its efforts. It offers a way for organizations and individuals to make tax-deductible donations to the STEM Action Center and enhance the investment the state has made in the Idaho STEM community. The nonprofit has secured \$325,627 in donations so far this fiscal year — about one-third of the more than \$950,000 in outside contributions the agency has received in FY 2020.

Visit [STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation](https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation) to make a tax-deductible donation. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, educator training, and many other life-shaping programs.

Dr. Hemingway said it's a wise investment considering how important science, technology, engineering, and mathematics knowledge and skills are to the future of Idaho. In addition to facilitating critical and creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration, she said STEM skills are needed for 17 of Idaho's 20 fastest growing jobs and that STEM jobs pay more than twice as much as non-STEM jobs.

"The state anticipates 20 percent job growth in STEM careers, including health care, computing, engineering, and advanced manufacturing, by 2026," Dr. Hemingway said. "Currently there are nearly 86,000 STEM workers statewide, and the Idaho Department of Labor predicts we may have 105,000 STEM jobs by 2026 – just six years from now. It is critical we build the STEM talent pipeline now so Idahoans have the knowledge and skills required to fill these high-demand STEM jobs in the future."

She said these jobs represent about \$7 billion in personal income and about \$352 million in tax revenue if Idaho's workforce is poised to fill them.

#### **About the Idaho STEM Action Center**

The Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, communities, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity. Visit [STEM.idaho.gov](https://STEM.idaho.gov) for more information.

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