

November 1, 2023

Dear Chairman Albers and Members of the Senate Study Committee on Expanding Georgia's Workforce:

My name is Rachel Kerestes and I proudly serve as the Executive Director of Science is US. We are a foundation-supported initiative that brings together a diverse group of science, engineering, industry, higher education and labor organizations to galvanize a broad, bipartisan base of support for science and technology.

I'm writing to you to reinforce what you heard from numerous speakers during presentations to the study committee over the past several months. Education is key to building the workforce of today and into the future, but I want to emphasize the importance of STEM education as a foundation for a growing number of career paths in Georgia's economy. It will also be critical to the future STEM labor pool that educators and parents dispel the stigma about not pursuing a traditional, bachelor level college education.

Simply put, Georgia currently has two million STEM jobs in science, technology, engineering, medicine and math-related fields and more than half of those STEM professionals don't have bachelor's degree.

According to a new analysis we produced of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, Georgia added more than 186,000 STEM jobs between 2017 and 2021, an increase of 9.6% - twice the national average of 4.7%.ⁱ

STEM positions now represent over one-third of the state's labor force and 39% of Georgia's gross domestic product.

Georgia's economy is deeply rooted in agriculture and agribusiness while new industries are making great strides in biotechnology, electric mobility, health and logistics. This diverse, successful economic engine thrives on STEM education and employment. Numerous CEOs and top business leaders made mention of recruiting efforts and training challenges. Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper also discussed the importance of education at all levels, including the technical college system, to help build the workforce. We could not agree more.

Notably, 56% of Georgia's STEM professionals do not have a bachelor's degree – earning their training through community colleges, apprenticeships, the military, vocational training and other technical education programs. The number of STEM professionals nationwide who do not hold a high school diploma is roughly equal to those who have doctoral or professional degrees.

These People of Science are advanced manufacturing specialists, economists, electricians, horticulturalists, infectious disease physicians and morticians, among others.

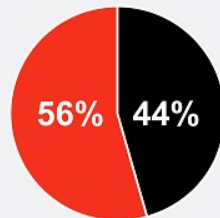
Science is US

Georgia's STEM Workforce

The percentage of Georgia's STEM workforce without a bachelor's degree (56%) is greater than the national average (55.4%).

Less than a
bachelor's degree

Bachelor's degree
and higher



2.1 Million

STEM Professionals

34%

of the state's workforce in STEM jobs

39%

of Georgia's GDP is directly the result of STEM

As evidenced by our analysis and other research studies, STEM provides excellent career opportunities to individuals at all levels of education. But the assumptions many hold about who America's STEM professionals are, the work they do and the education they pursue needs to change. This is especially true now when employers are struggling to fill STEM jobs, families are questioning whether a four-year college education is likely to produce an adequate return on investment and policymakers are considering how best to build our future workforce.

To succeed, Georgia's STEM workforce needs professionals with all levels of educational attainment and experience. We cannot devalue or deemphasize any of these pathways or careers if we want our economy to thrive or Georgians to find fulfilling, well-paid careers.

ⁱ Science is US, People of Science: An Inclusive Analysis of the U.S. STEM Workforce and its Economic Impact, March 1, 2023: <https://scienceisus.org/people-of-science/>