



## Guest column: Idaho's youth deserve quality STEM education

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*Anne Siefert*

The INL works diligently to spread knowledge in STEM subjects throughout Idaho, writes Anne Seifert.

I want to thank [Kristy Reese for her recent letter to the editor](#). Kristy was spot-on in highlighting the importance of innovation and parental involvement in the education of our children.

As a former school principal and current program manager for K-12 STEM at Idaho National Laboratory, one sentence in Kristy's letter really resonated with me. She wrote: "In the Idaho Falls area, we also have a large number of well-educated persons who are working for or retired from places like Idaho National Laboratory. I would love to see a program that incentivizes them to share their knowledge with Idaho's youth."



The good news, Kristy, is that for several years INL has worked diligently to spread knowledge about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects throughout Idaho. And the state is a willing and enthusiastic partner in this effort.

In Fiscal Year 2017, INL reached more than 85,000 students through STEM outreach programs, 20,000 parents and teachers through STEM outreach programs, and 600 teachers through our professional development efforts. INL contractor Battelle Energy Alliance (BEA) awarded \$325,000 in grants to support STEM education in schools throughout Idaho.

We do this because Idaho's children, whether they live in towns large or small, deserve the opportunity to receive education and training that will allow them to pursue careers and raise their families here at home.

We know Idaho – and INL for that matter – will face a shortage of STEM-educated and trained workers in the near future. And we understand that early exposure to these subjects can spark a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.

That's why INL awarded a \$10,000 grant to Longfellow Elementary School in Idaho Falls, to create a hands-on learning "maker's space," and a separate \$10,000 grant to Rigby Middle School for an update to a science lab.

That's why we host a "My Amazing Future" day for nearly 150 8th-grade girls at the laboratory, sponsor an annual science bowl, recently led two days of classroom lessons at Shoshone-Bannock Jr./Sr. High School in Fort Hall, and work with cadets at the Idaho Youth Challenge Academy in the small northern Idaho community of Pierce.

That's why we participate in the annual Hispanic Youth Summit in the Treasure Valley, share information about opportunities in technical fields with underserved and rural communities, and host interns from towns small and large throughout Idaho.

We do this because INL is Idaho's national laboratory and every child matters. As INL Director Mark Peters wrote in a recent blog on the U.S. Department of Energy's STEM Rising website (<https://energy.gov/articles/lighting-spark-pursue-stem-education-idaho>): "All of us in Idaho, working together, from Pre-K through career, have accomplished so much. But we are not content. We will keep moving forward to ensure every child has the opportunity to excel and no one is left behind."

I'm so pleased to work with the good people at Idaho's STEM Action Center our K-12 schools, colleges and universities and nonprofits to drive this effort. And I'm so proud of our community for voting to create Eastern Idaho Community College, which will provide our children affordable education opportunities and help fill the talent pipeline for decades to come.

So Kristy, I hope this gives you and everyone else a window into the efforts being made to expand knowledge, training and opportunity in our state, for as you correctly wrote in the concluding line of your letter: "Without these 21st Century skills, Idaho's youth will not be able to successfully participate in the global economy."

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**Seifert is the Idaho National Laboratory's K-12 STEM program manager.**