

Five groups who benefit from the BSA's superb STEM programs

Posted on February 18, 2016 by Bryan Wendell in STEM // 33 Comments*



Some young people react to time spent outdoors with delight. Others with dread.

The outdoors-averse are just one of the groups that can benefit from the BSA's programming in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

The Boy Scouts of America offers life-changing experiences for every young person. And they can get those experiences wherever they want — in a state park, in a classroom, on a sailboat or — more and more these days — in a laboratory.

STEM comes in two flavors. There's STEM in traditional Scouting, which includes the Nova awards program, STEM-based adventures in Cub Scouts and STEM-related merit badges in Boy Scouts. And then there's STEM Scouts, a hands-on, all-STEM program currently serving 14 cities. (I went over the differences between STEM in Scouting and STEM Scouts in this post.)

Any young person who experiences STEM in Scouting or STEM Scouts will benefit. But Dr. Richard Stone, a Greater Alabama Council volunteer on the BSA's STEM/Nova committee, sees five specific groups who seem to fit especially well.

1. Youth not interested in the outdoors

“Some youth are just not interested in the outdoors,” Stone explains. “Do they not deserve the benefits of a full Scouting experience?”

Most of us would argue they do. STEM Scouts, with labs for elementary through high school students, offers a way to deliver the values of Scouting in a unique setting.

2. Young people with disabilities

First off: What's up with that spelling? Dr. Stone and his colleagues use that unusual capitalization to emphasize a young person's abilities, not his or her disabilities.

For example, Dr. Stone tells of a young boy named Michael who has Down syndrome. The boy's mother told Dr. Stone how STEM activities have changed this Scout's life.

"This program was a great way for Michael to interact with his fellow Cub Scouts," the mother wrote. "Michael learns best in a hands-on environment, and the STEM program provided that for him. As a parent of a son with special needs, I would like to applaud the Boy Scouts of America for encouraging all kids of all abilities to participate in the STEM program. It was a great experience for Michael."

And then there's Todd, a Scout with high-functioning autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Todd's dad observed how STEM programs within Scouting have helped Todd improve his social skills, develop friendships and have a greater view of the world.

3. Webelos and Arrow of Light Cub Scouts

Sometimes these oldest Cub Scouts (and their leaders) are looking for something new to try as they anxiously await the transition to Boy Scouting.

STEM offers just the thing. They can start with the Dr. Charles H. Townes Supernova Award, which takes Webelos Scouts on a journey through science, technology, engineering and math.

4. Scouts looking for a leg up in the workforce

STEM offers career opportunities galore, and by starting early in STEM Scouts or STEM in traditional Scouting, young people are getting a head start.

"The public, schools and future employers see STEM as preparing youth for their future," Stone says. "Promoting STEM programs within the community will make it easier to convince the public that Scouting is relevant and useful."

5. Young women

STEM Scouts adds to the BSA's range of programming another co-ed opportunity. That means girls as young as third grade can join a lab, become Scouts and enjoy Scouting's values.

These young women can continue in STEM Scouts until they graduate high school or, if so inclined, move to Venturing or Sea Scouts once they're older.

*Reference Link, <http://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2016/02/18/stem-is-the-bsas-answer-to-scouts-who-are-less-interested-in-the-outdoors/>

During the months of November 2015 to January 2016, I asked for input from YOU: scouts, parents, scouters, scouting friends, and organizations in White Oak District about the value of STEM in Scouting. Your testimonials and comments were well received by the BSA National STEM NOVA Committee and contributed to the generation of this article.

Many Thanks. Kevin Hopson, WOD STEM Coordinator