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## STEAM on Capitol Hill

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# STEAM on Capitol Hill

## Abstract

Our increasingly technology-driven economy demands a workforce that is proficient in both the concepts and techniques of STEM fields as well as in extending those skills into new applications and innovations. Currently, an impressive and diverse coalition of educators, art advocates, industry leaders, and STEM practitioners across the county are working to achieve that goal, bringing their ideas and advocacy to Capitol Hill.

## Author/Artist Bio

Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici was sworn in as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives on February 7, 2012. She represents the First Congressional District of Oregon, which comprises the Northwest portion of the state. As a member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, Suzanne focuses on making college more affordable and reforming public education. She founded the bipartisan Congressional STEAM Caucus, which aims to encourage innovation and creative thinking by integrating arts and design with science, technology, engineering, and math education. Suzanne also serves as a member of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and she is the ranking Democratic member of the Subcommittee on the Environment. Suzanne first moved to Oregon from Michigan in the mid-1970s. She worked her way through college in Eugene, first at Lane Community College, where she earned an Associate Degree from the Legal Assistant program, and then at the University of Oregon, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts from the School of Journalism. In 1983, she received her J.D. from the University of Oregon School of Law. During college and law school, Suzanne worked at Lane County Legal Aid Service. Suzanne and her husband, Michael, have two grown children and a cocker spaniel named Charley.

Congressman Aaron Schock, a product of Peoria, IL, is currently in his third term representing the 18th District of Illinois. In addition to co-chairing the Congressional STEAM Caucus, he currently serves on the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversees tax and trade policy, and the Committee on House Administration, which provides internal oversight for the House of Representatives. Aaron got his start in public office when he was elected to the Peoria School Board as a write-in candidate at the age of 19. At 22, his school board colleagues voted to make Aaron vice president of the board and a year later they voted unanimously to make him board president for one of the state's largest school districts. He then was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he succeeded in passing 18 substantive bills, several of which were hailed as "landmark reforms." Learn more at <http://schock.house.gov>.

## Keywords

STEAM, STEM, arts integration, Congress

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## **STEAM on Capitol Hill**

*Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici & Congressman Aaron Schock*

Our increasingly technology-driven economy demands a workforce that is proficient in the concepts and techniques of STEM fields, but that's not enough; we also need a workforce full of people who can extend those skills into new applications and innovations. Currently, an impressive and diverse coalition of educators, art advocates, industry leaders, and STEM practitioners across the county are working to achieve that goal, and we have been honored to join and promote their efforts on Capitol Hill. As the co-chairs of the Congressional STEAM Caucus, a membership organization for Representatives in Congress, we are advocating for the integration of the arts and design, broadly defined, into STEM.

We're both children of piano teachers and longtime supporters of the arts in our respective communities in Oregon and Illinois, so the decision to found the STEAM Caucus was an easy one. Both of us have seen the positive impact that the arts can have on students and communities, and we understand the importance of creativity and innovation to economic development. That message – the importance of innovation - resonates across the country and in our nation's Capitol. In Washington, D.C., the STEAM Caucus exemplifies what can be accomplished through bipartisanship, with 64 members from both political parties and every region of the country. Through informational briefings, dissemination of information, and policy advocacy, our goal is to increase awareness of STEAM and bring arts integration policy to the federal level.

The momentum behind STEAM today continues to grow, but if we look back through history we see that the concept is far from new. Leonardo DaVinci was both an accomplished scientist and artist; Samuel F.B. Morse, inventor of Morse code and pioneer of the telegraph, was also a well-known painter; and studies of Nobel Laureates in the Sciences for the past century reveal that they are significantly more likely to participate in some form of artistic pursuit in their free time than the general public.

Throughout history, the sciences and the arts have informed and enhanced each other, and both have advanced and enriched the human experience in myriad ways. The relationship between these disciplines is symbiotic, not static. Both are, at their core, fundamentally human pursuits that seek answers to the deepest questions of our nature.

In that way, then, STEAM isn't so much about building a relationship between the arts and STEM, but *reintegrating* the two in our classrooms. STEM education should engage students and open their eyes to the world around them and the forces, particles, and mathematical principles that literally make the world go 'round. By engaging students in these concepts on multiple levels using an interdisciplinary approach, they are encouraged to make connections between the information they learn in the classroom and its real world applications. Studies have shown that engaging and educating both sides of the brain can improve students' ability to manipulate and remember data, help them analyze information, and generally improve cognitive skills. And importantly, when students are engaged in the subjects they study, they are more likely to stay in school.

From our view on Capitol Hill, the future of STEAM looks bright. The work of countless individuals and organizations across the country is furthering the message and helping to engage students in STEM subjects in ways that inspire them to continue in those fields. We're grateful for all who are participating, and we look forward to continuing to work with them – and many more – to promote the STEAM movement.

As we look to the first anniversary of the STEAM Caucus in February, we invite to you join this effort by encouraging your representative in Congress to become a member of the caucus, and by helping us spread the STEAM message.

Email [steam.caucus@housemail.house.gov](mailto:steam.caucus@housemail.house.gov) to be added to the mailing list.