

**Sarah Link**

**Why the Arts and Sciences Belong Together:**

The drive for young Americans to be competitive in the global job market has spurred changes in education policy. After recent data showed American students lagging behind other countries in science, technology, engineering and math skills, the [US Department of Education](#) proposed a comprehensive strategy to strengthen STEM education.

The numbers clearly show that renewed attention to teaching these skills is necessary, but some people including myself are hesitant to embrace the policy. The truth is that a STEM education leaves out one crucial component of competitive workforce; creativity. And that comes with integrating arts education into a STEM curriculum.

A new counter movement, which is gathering steam (pardon my pun), is based on the idea that the arts encourage creative thinking in the engineering and science fields and therefore need to be part of the STEM education policy. This new initiative for a STEAM education is gaining national press attention and has attracted a following of educators. You can find more information on the founders of the initiative at the Rhode Island School of Design visit: [stemtosteam.org](http://stemtosteam.org).

Here is my personal take on why arts should go hand in hand with a STEM education. The arts encourage students to create things that are unique. I know this first hand because I was fortunate enough to go to a school district that always supported arts and music education. I was constantly pushed to use my imagination, whether I was learning a new violin solo, practicing getting in character for a theatrical role or sketching a portrait for art class.

And guess what? I had to use those same creative thinking skills in my science and math classes. In physics class I had to build a sturdy bridge of toothpicks, make lamp from a block of wood in woodshop class and design a new experiment from scratch in biology class.

While my personal experience is just one small example, we see the benefits of art in all new technologies, large or small. I don't think Apple® products would have the same popularity if the creators had not paid attention to basic design principles and aesthetics. The engineers and architects of new public buildings, bridges and other structure have to consider design at the very beginning.

If we want our students to be successful and competitive in the work force, we don't just need students who excel at STEM skills. We need students who can think outside the box, and use their skills creatively. So, full STEAM ahead!