

REGIONAL STEAM PROGRAM PREPARING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

By Emily Barnwell

In today's ever-evolving workforce, the need for creativity, collaboration and critical thinking has never been more important. That's why innovative education programs like the Maize USD 266's Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) curriculum are essential in shaping tomorrow's talent.

Beginning its third year in August 2025, the Maize STEAM program has already made a significant impact. What makes this initiative stand out is its structure: all K-6 students receive STEAM instruction as part of their regular specials rotation. It's something educators say is unique among Kansas school districts.

"I believe STEAM programs are important for helping our students build a strong foundation in critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity through hands-on learning. Our students are actively engaged, moving, exploring, collaborating and testing their ideas," said Maggie Hatesohl, a fifth-grade STEAM teacher at Maize Intermediate School. "We show students how these skills are relevant beyond the classroom and will serve them in whatever they decide to do in the future."

Melissa Love, a K-4 STEAM teacher and part of the district's founding STEAM team, said the program is designed to be a launchpad for young learners.

"It helps create well-rounded students who will be prepared for challenges and opportunities by equipping them with technical and creative skills, along with honing in on social-emotional learning," explained Love. "They work in diverse groups, practice communication and become creative, innovative problem solvers."





Career Exploration

The program is also intentionally aligned with career exploration. STEAM teachers partner with the Maize Career Academy to introduce elementary students to real-world professions, creating early exposure to pathways they may pursue later in life.

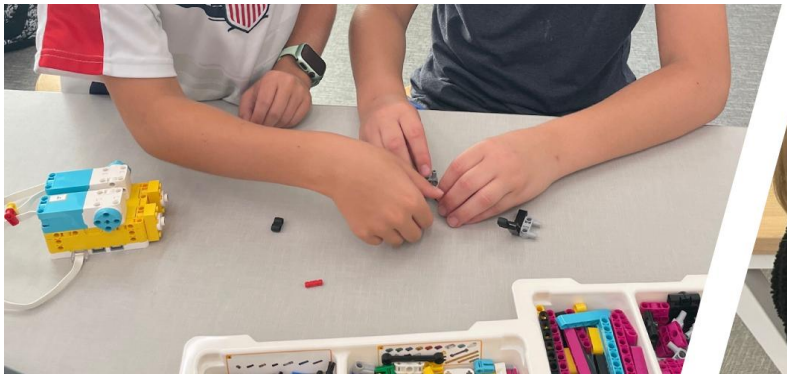
Madison Anderson, a STEAM teacher at Pray-Woodman Elementary School, said the program's cross-disciplinary nature gives students meaningful connections to the world around them.

“We’re not just teaching content, we’re building curiosity,” Anderson said. “Students are introduced to real-world applications

of STEAM and understand how these disciplines connect. It builds the foundation for creative thinking and resilience, which are essential for future careers."

At the Partnership, developing a globally competitive workforce is a top priority. The organization's Talent Roadmap guides regional efforts to strengthen the talent pipeline, from early childhood to career. The Partnership's Talent Team regularly collaborates with regional school districts and community partners to help ensure students are equipped with the skills needed to succeed.

The Maize STEAM program is a prime example of how early education can play a key role in workforce development. By fostering critical thinking, sparking curiosity and encouraging teamwork, students are gaining more than just academic knowledge, they are building skills for life.





Encouraging Results

"One of my students who had a hard time focusing in class came into my room and immediately connected with our coding lesson using Scratch Jr.," Love recalled. "He ended up building a full animation with voiceover—and he's in kindergarten. His para said she'd never seen him so focused. That's what STEAM can do."

For Hatesohl, moments of breakthrough are constant reminders of the program's value.

"This year, a student realized we had used math in our rocket launch project and said, 'Wait, we used math? But it was so fun!'" Hatesohl shared. "That's the power of STEAM. It makes learning meaningful."

As the program continues to grow with the addition of more instructors, tools and community partnerships, the district hopes to deepen its connection to local industries and workforce needs.

"A future goal for our STEAM program is to build more community partnerships and career connections. Wichita is home to many organizations with strong ties to STEAM fields, and our district's Career Academy is helping us to already build up these valuable partnerships. Creating a bridge between our classroom and our community would enrich our students' learning by bringing real-world experiences and expertise into our lessons," Hatesohl said.

For more information about the Maize STEAM program and involvement opportunities, please contact Michael Dome, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Grades PreK-6. Michael Dome.