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June 13, 2013

The Honorable Dr. John Holdren  
Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy  
Executive Office of the President  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW Room 5228  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Dr. Holdren,

Thank you for your service and continued efforts over that last several years as Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). As an engineer by trade, I understand and value the importance of sound science. Implementing and coordinating the major policy, plans, and programs of the federal government is no easy task, and I commend you for your work.

I am writing to discuss the *Federal Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education 5-Year Strategic Plan* (Plan) released by the Committee on STEM Education (CoSTEM) of the National Science and Technology Council on May 31, 2013.

Let me begin by expressing my strong support for the goals and principles of the Plan. Any effort to make STEM a priority and to make federal efforts in this area more efficient and effective is incredibly important.

I am concerned, however, about the lack of focus on middle skill job training and education in the Plan. In total, the Plan did not mention vocational schools once, and only briefly discussed the role of community colleges in improving STEM education. While there was repeated emphasis on four-year and graduate degree programs, there was little mention of associates degrees or other professional certification programs.

In an education system that too often prices out middle and working class families, our vocational schools and community colleges bring much-needed affordability and accessibility into the picture. They are absolutely critical vehicles for delivering STEM education to students who might not have contact with these programs otherwise.

My own district highlights the integral role that middle-skill STEM jobs will play in our country's economic future. Whether it was textile production in Fall River or manufacturing in Attleboro: the regional economy in the Fourth District of Massachusetts has shifted dramatically over the past few decades and has left our traditionally trained workforce in the dust. Unemployment hovers in the mid-double digits in several areas, and household incomes struggle to break \$40,000 a year.

For these communities, the innovation economy holds the key to the jobs, industry, and economic activity they sorely need. Industries like advanced manufacturing, clean energy, information technology, and life sciences bring with them hundreds of thousands of middle-skill jobs. STEM should be the cornerstone of our efforts to ensure we have an educated workforce ready to seize those jobs.

This week the Brookings Institute released “The Hidden STEM Economy,” a report that concluded the efforts on the part of government, particularly on the federal level, have missed critical opportunities to support STEM fields that do not require a four-year degree or higher. According to the report, half of all STEM jobs are available to workers without a four-year college degree, and these jobs pay \$53,000 a year on average – ten percent higher than jobs with similar educational requirements. Citing the National Research Council and National Academy of Engineering’s report, “Community Colleges in the Evolving STEM Education Landscape: Summary of a Summit,” the report also noted that nearly half of all four-year STEM graduates start their higher education careers at community colleges.

We are all on the same page in believing in the importance of STEM education. Moving forward, I would like to work with you to ensure we approach the issue comprehensively, so that every student – regardless of zip code or family income or anything else– has the chance to unlock the opportunity that STEM can provide.

I look forward to working closely with you on this issue. Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Sincerely,



Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, National Science Foundation (NSF)

Leland Melvin, Associate Administrator for Education, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)