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In the Middle: A focus on STEM

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Have you ever asked one of your relatives or a friend younger than you about the stuff they learn at school? Then you probably realize what they're learning differs from what you were learning when you were their age.

A lot of the difference could be an increased focus on STEM. I am very proud to attend Barker Middle Schoool, an Indiana-certified STEM school! Here in Michigan City, we also have a STEM-certified elementary school, Lake Hills.

But what is STEM, anyway? Why should kids be learning in this way?

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and it teaches students how to think critically by improving their problem-solving skills. STEM can be customized for any learning level and it encourages teamwork, collaboration and communication.

STEM requires a significant amount of trial and error. It makes you think more and it doesn't let you take the easy way out. It also enhances your way of thinking and makes you look at things from a different perspective. STEM teaches you how to communicate your ideas by doing things like group projects. It helps the shy kids come out of their shells and learn to interact with a group of people.

It also helps prepare students for the future. Thanks to the speed of innovation, STEM jobs in the United States will grow by 14 percent from 2010 to 2020. The STEM skills Gap Report found that, "59 percent of businesses and 79 percent of universities believe there aren't enough candidates leaving education who are skilled enough to meet industry employment requirements." One source claims that "as little as 16 percent of college graduates graduate in a STEM industry field or subject." If only 16 percent of college graduates graduate into a STEM industry, there won't be enough people to fill STEM jobs!

There are benefits to starting STEM learning early, too. This allows children to tap into their natural curiosity to be engaged, active, and take initiative. It lays a foundation that sticks with them. Research proves that schools and parents should allow young children more time for play and investigation. So get your child outside doing science experiments, instead of being in the house preoccupied with video games!

STEM education prepares students for the world. It gives them valuable skills that they will need to succeed in school, work, and life.

STEM can unlock a whole new world of possibilities for students, or even for you!

Destiny Meneweather is a student at Barker Middle School. In the Middle is a regular column produced by MCAS middle school students.