

# The STEM PUSH Network: Establishing a novel accreditation model for Pre-College STEM Programs | NSF 1930990



*Community Partners:* **David Bild**, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, [dbild@naturemuseum.org](mailto:dbild@naturemuseum.org); **Priya Mohabir**, New York Hall of Science, [pmohabir@nysci.org](mailto:pmohabir@nysci.org); *PI:* **Alison Legg**, University of Pittsburgh, [alisonsl@pitt.edu](mailto:alisonsl@pitt.edu); *Research Project Staff:* **Disan Davis**, University of Pittsburgh, [disand@pitt.edu](mailto:disand@pitt.edu); **Olivia Phillips**, University of Pittsburgh, [olp11@pitt.edu](mailto:olp11@pitt.edu). [stempushnetwork.org](http://stempushnetwork.org)

## Project Description

The STEM PUSH Network, an NSF INCLUDES Alliance, is working to leverage the power of pre-college STEM programs (PCSPs) to broaden participation of Black, Latina/o/e, and Indigenous students in STEM, and create systemic change in higher education admissions.

## Key Achievements

*What have you **accomplished** to date?*

A novel, equity-centered model to accredit PCSPs has been developed and piloted with Middle States Association. Undergrad admissions partners are now paying attention to STEM PUSH students' PCSP experiences in their applications.

*What have you **learned**?*

This evidence-based credential could change the way admissions accounts for out-of-school-time academic achievement.

## Audience & Settings

**Audience:** Out-of-school STEM, informal education, higher education admissions, formal education, students, and families

**Disciplinary Area:** General STEM

**Learning Environment:** Out-of-school time pre-college STEM programs

## Access & Inclusion

PCSPs impart analytical thinking skills and habits-of-mind that are predictive of success in STEM, but are not systematically factored into admissions review. STEM PUSH is creating the first nationwide network of PCSPs accredited for meeting quality standards for broadening participation in STEM.



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**TAGS**

- Community Impact
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences

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An equity-centered program at the University of Pittsburgh aiming to expand access to STEM education has reached an important milestone.

Broadening Equity in STEM (BE STEM) is now an accredited learning service provider according to the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

**BE STEM** is one of several federal research initiatives under the **STEM PUSH Network**, which is a National Science Foundation-funded effort to develop a formal standard for pre-college STEM programs. The goal is to help them become more fairly evaluated by admissions departments at universities, which will ultimately help participating students succeed.

"Higher education admissions departments have had no way to uniformly account for the value that these pre-college programs bring," said Alison Slinsky Legg, a teaching professor in biological sciences in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and the director of BE STEM at Pitt. "They're often not factored in, or thought of as light extracurricular when in fact, these programs are doing a lot of the heavy, educational work that students often aren't getting in their formal K-12 schooling."

This lack of consideration by college admissions was the impetus for BE STEM's push for accreditation.



Scan here or visit [tinyurl.com/BESTEM](https://tinyurl.com/BESTEM) to read more about pre-college program accreditation.

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## Expanding Access & Equity in the College Admissions Process

STEM PUSH is working to change college admissions to expand access and equity for Black, Latina/o/e and Indigenous students in STEM fields. Our aim is to improve college-going and persistence in STEM for students in our participating 40+ pre-college STEM programs.

The Supreme Court is poised to weaken race-conscious admissions practices, a move that may have profound implications for equity in higher education. As educators and admissions professionals seek effective ways to counter systemic inequities for Black, Latina/o/e and Indigenous students, the work of STEM PUSH's admissions strand is more important than ever.

Even before the recent challenge to race-conscious admissions practices, established higher education admissions has been systemically unfair to Black, Latina/o/e and Indigenous, and multiply marginalized students. Many of these students apply to colleges interested in STEM and with unique STEM skills and experiences developed through their pre-college STEM program (PCSP); however, some students have been rejected from institutions despite successes in their STEM program, which in some cases include authoring research publications.

We think such disconnects are due to several factors, including systemic limitations that are compounded through the admissions process, and a lack of support to help them stand out to admissions offices.

In this issue, we identify current challenges and opportunities in the college admissions process.

**Disan Davis**  
Research Associate:  
Admissions, Accreditation & Ecosystems



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