

## From the HSA, *Dan Aladjem & Jenny Murray, Co-presidents*

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I generally shy away from singling out teachers in this column, but my older daughter has a great teacher this year who does amazing things to make science exciting for students. My daughter is always coming home and asking interesting questions about science or telling me about the latest cool thing she's done at school. I was thinking a lot about that last week. Last week I had the chance to participate in the DCPS STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) Stakeholder Summit. DCPS brought together people from academia, government, industry, professional societies, nonprofits, and even a few teachers in an effort to find ways to support science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science in DC public schools. I know that many parents at Lafayette feel that the federally-mandated emphasis on reading and mathematics (as worthy as it is) has had the unfortunate side effect of reducing the time available for and emphasis on science. Those of you who know me, know that I'm hardly a cheerleader for DCPS (or much of anything). Most of the time, I'm quite the opposite. That's why I'm so pleasantly surprised to report that I saw real dedication to improving the STEM opportunities in DC. That won't mean a science teacher or science lab in every school. That's just not realistic given the resources. It's also way too early in the process to say what STEM education in DC will look like in 1, 5, or 10 years. It is pretty clear to me, however, that it will look a lot better.

Why am I so optimistic? The vision for DCPS that was articulated at this day-long meeting focuses on teachers and students (always a good place to start) and sets a couple of really progressive and promising goals: cultivating a thriving professional community among teachers and developing problem-solving skills and interest in STEM (there are other goals, but these--and I've paraphrased them--stood out). While the teacher evaluation system (Impact) is implicit in the STEM vision, it's secondary to the idea of treating teachers as professionals who can work together to improve teaching and learning in their schools. The vision is decidedly not that of teacher as assembly-line worker, but teacher as professional. To me that's just huge. Equally impressive is the emphasis on students learning to solve problems as scientists do and developing an abiding interest in STEM (since not everyone has to love STEM, but everyone ought at least not to hate it and should be fully engaged in school while studying STEM). So in this vision, teachers are professionals and students are not widgets. All I can say, is it's about time. DCPS is just starting to move on STEM. If you're interested in learning more, follow [@DCSTEMEducation](#) on twitter (for that matter don't forget to follow the HSA [@lafayetteDC](#)). In May there's going to be a district-wide elementary school STEM celebration. You'll hear more when it's officially announced. *-Dan*