Title: K-2 Cornerstone STEAM Recommendation

Type: Discussion

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Description: The Teaching & Learning Department formally recommends a pause on the development and implementation of K–2 Cornerstone STEAM projects during the current cycle of core curriculum adoptions. This recommendation reflects a strategic commitment to instructional depth over breadth and is grounded in implementation science research, which emphasizes focus, sequencing, and fidelity during periods of significant instructional change. It also reflects a developmentally responsive approach to instruction in the primary grades. The multi-week, product-driven Cornerstone model remains a strong fit for Grades 3–5; however, in Grades K–2, STEAM learning is most effective when embedded within daily literacy and numeracy instruction through guided inquiry and structured exploration.

By limiting concurrent initiatives during active curriculum implementation—and by delivering STEAM in ways aligned to early childhood developmental milestones—we enable K–2 educators to prioritize high-quality core instruction that inherently advances our STEAM objectives and ensures students experience consistent, rigorous, and age-appropriate learning every day.

Recommendation: Discuss the recommended adjustment to Edina PreK-5 STEAM programming.

Desired Outcomes from the Board: Review the report, have questions prepared, and provide feedback on the key information presented for decisions on next steps.

Attachment: STEAM One Pager

The Rationale: Why This is the Right Path for K–2

Our rationale for this shift honors the current capacity of our teaching staff and honors the instructional quality for students, recognizing that our new core curriculum adoptions provide a robust and integrated student experience that align with the 4 Key Components of STEAM.

1. Maximizing Teacher Capacity During Core Adoptions

The primary responsibility of our K–2 educators over the next three years is the mastery and delivery of new, rigorous core instructional materials. To add the requirement of Cornerstone Projects during this window would create "initiative fatigue" and dilute the quality of core instruction for our students.

- Past Years (2023-2024): Implementation of new Science curriculum: Mystery Science
- Current Year (2025-2026): Implementation of new Reading/ELA curriculum: Benchmark
- Next Year (2026-27): Implementation of new Social Studies curriculum:
- Following Year (2027-28): Implementation of new Math curriculum:

By removing the requirement for STEAM Cornerstone Projects, we allow teachers the focus and time necessary to implement these foundational subjects with excellence centered on student outcomes. The Edina definition of STEAM has been intentionally rooted in strong literacy and numeracy foundations from the outset.

2. Inherent STEAM Integration in Core Curricula

The most compelling reason to pause on the development of K–2 STEAM programming is that our new curriculum adoptions are already designed around 3 of the 4 STEAM Pillars. We no longer need to look *outside* of our core blocks to find high-level STEAM experiences; they are now woven into the fabric of daily instruction.

An Overview of How the New Curricula Meet STEAM Goals:

- **Inquiry-Based Learning:** Rather than following a set of rote instructions, the new ELA, Math, Social Studies, and Science materials lead with student questioning. Students investigate "essential questions" that require them to gather evidence and build theories, which is the heart of inquiry in the Edina STEAM mindset.
- **Authenticity:** The new Math, Social Studies and Science adoptions focus on real-world problems and civic engagement. While engaging in the learning, students are applying their content knowledge to solve problems relevant to their communities, mirroring the "Authenticity" pillar of STEAM.

- **Integration:** All learning is most impactful when it is integrated. The new Benchmark curriculum intentionally builds knowledge for students by weaving in social studies and science standards into units and lessons.

3. Developmentally Responsive Instruction (Grades K–2 vs. 3–5)

The instructional design of a K–2 classroom differs fundamentally from the upper elementary grades. While the "Cornerstone Project" model (multi-week, independent, product-driven) remains a high-leverage fit for grades 3–5, it does not align as intentionally with the cognitive load and developmental milestones of our youngest learners.

- **The Literacy Shift:** In Grades 3–5, students transition from "Learning to Read" to "Reading to Learn." Older students possess the decoding skills and executive function necessary to navigate the independent research and project management required by Cornerstone lessons.
- **Foundational Knowledge Building:** Research in early childhood education (e.g., *Neuman & Wright*) suggests that K–2 students benefit most from embedded inquiry. For a 6-year-old, STEAM mindset is best developed through high-frequency, teacher-led "micro-investigations" within their daily reading and math, rather than a singular, disconnected multi-week project.
- **Executive Function:** K–2 students are still developing the working memory and cognitive flexibility required for the "long-form" project-based learning (PBL) typical of Cornerstones. By integrating STEAM into the core, we provide the "scaffolding" necessary for them to succeed in the more independent Cornerstone models they will encounter in Grade 3.

Conclusion

We recognize our community's strong passion for STEAM in alignment with our strategic plan. This recommendation is not intended to pull back from Edina's commitment to STEAM, but it is a more intentional and developmentally responsive way of delivering it. By leaning into the inquiry-rich design of our new Science, ELA, Social Studies, and Math adoptions, K–2 students experience consistent, integrated STEAM learning every day, grounded in literacy, numeracy, and real-world problem solving. This focused approach ensures students benefit from coherent, high-quality instruction during their most foundational years, while allowing educators to implement new curricula with the fidelity required for long-term success. As core curriculum implementation stabilizes, we will reassess whether additional STEAM structures, such as Cornerstone Projects, would further enhance K–2 STEAM learning.