WASHINGTON, D.C. — Dec. 5, 2023 — Gallup and Walton Family Foundation released a new report today, *Voices of Gen Z: Perspectives on STEM Education and Careers*, which surveyed over 2,000 Gen Z members on their interest in and preparation for various careers, including STEM roles. The study finds that while 75% of Gen Z youth are interested in STEM occupations, only 29% list a STEM role as their first-choice career. Lack of exposure to core STEM concepts, especially for female members of Gen Z, may be contributing to this disconnect.

The research shows that exposure to STEM curriculum in school is associated with an increased likelihood of wanting, pursuing and ultimately obtaining a career in the field. Students exposed to four or five technology-related topics in school are more than twice as likely to want a future STEM job, more than twice as likely to declare a college STEM major and over five times as likely to be employed in a STEM role than their peers who are exposed to just one technology-related topic or none at all.

"If we fail to engage and inspire Gen Z in the realm of STEM and quantum technology, we risk missing out on transformative innovations," said Corban Tillemann-Dick, founder and CEO of Maybell Quantum, a quantum hardware startup that works to advance U.S. quantum leadership. "These young minds have the potential to solve some of our most complex challenges, and it is our responsibility to nurture and guide their talents."

Limited exposure to foundational STEM concepts in school may be contributing to the drop-off between students' interest in and eventual pursuit of STEM jobs. A majority of students (82%) say their school offered a variety of STEM classes for real-world applications in math and science principles, and 72% say they had opportunities to participate in STEM extracurriculars, but fewer have engaged in hands-on STEM classroom activities such as building an electrical circuit (29%) or using technology like coding programs or robots (42%), skills that underlie many STEM jobs. Only about a third of Gen Z high schoolers report having learned about core STEM-related topics, including 3D design (31%), cybersecurity (23%) and hydraulics (32%).

"Creating access to equitable and hands-on STEM experiences is key to helping inspire and prepare today's youth to claim their positions among the next generation of innovators and ultimately fuel a more skilled and inclusive future workforce," said Dawn Jones, Vice President of Social Impact and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Intel Corporation. "Ensuring access to STEM learning opportunities for all youth is a cornerstone of our country's future, and we cannot get there without all of us, from policymakers and educators to business and industry leaders, working together to make this possible. Through our K-12 STEM education programming, Intel aims to foster curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity to create a diverse community of learners poised to shape the future."

Gender disparities in STEM experiences may be creating barriers that deter girls and women in Gen Z from the field. Female members of Gen Z are less interested than their male counterparts in STEM fields (63% vs. 85%, respectively), and fewer females than males report learning about technical STEM concepts such as computer programming and coding in their coursework (39% vs. 54%). When asked why they are not interested in a STEM career, 57% of female respondents say they don't think they would be good at it, compared with 38% of males.
“There have been significant, impactful investments in STEM education, but even more is needed to ensure students move beyond interest and actually explore careers in STEM,” said Stephanie Marken, Gallup partner and executive director for education research. “By creating programs that allow students the opportunity to explore, understand and apply core STEM concepts and to participate in hands-on learning, we can set youth up for successful careers in an industry that desperately needs them.”

About Walton Family Foundation

Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.