# Bridging the STEM Gap: How Science on Wheels Transforms Learning Across Washington

December 11, 2025 AI Summary

Watch the LEVinar recording

Moderated by **Arik Korman**, CEO of the League of Education Voters and a parent advocate for educational equity, this session explored how Pacific Science Center's **Science on Wheels** program is revolutionizing STEM education for students who might otherwise lack access to high-quality science experiences.

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## Why This Matters

Arik began by framing the conversation around equity and justice:

*"Education is a tool for justice. One of the systems that perpetuate racial and disability injustice is our schools. Every child deserves an excellent public education that provides equitable opportunities for success."*

With only **55% of Washington students meeting science standards**, the need for innovative solutions is urgent. Science on Wheels, which served **116,000 learners across 48 legislative districts last year**, is one such solution—bringing STEM directly to schools, especially those in low-income and rural communities. **87% of these programs were provided at little or no cost**, thanks to legislative and philanthropic support.

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## The Origin Story and Evolution

**Holly Duskin**, Senior Manager of Outreach Education at Pacific Science Center, shared the program's roots:

*"Science on Wheels started in 1974 during the energy crisis. Gas prices were so high that schools couldn't afford field trips to Seattle. Our educators came up with an innovative solution—they loaded science activities into vans and drove to schools."*

Over 50 years later, Science on Wheels has grown into Washington's largest science outreach program, offering:

- **Live Science Shows**: School-wide assemblies featuring exciting demonstrations like vacuum chambers to explain air pressure in space.
- **Pop-Up Exhibits**: Self-guided stations where students explore anatomy models, engineering challenges, and wind tunnels for parachute experiments.
- **Classroom Workshops**: Grade-specific, hands-on activities such as building robots, conducting magnet investigations, and immersive experiences in a mobile planetarium dome.

The program also includes **Digital Discovery Workshops**, virtual sessions that prepare students for in-person visits and feature close-up demonstrations like sheep heart dissections to teach anatomy.

Recent innovations include:

- **Electric and hybrid vehicles** added to the fleet in 2023 for sustainability.
- Expanded programming for **pre-K learners** and multilingual students.
- Relaunch of math-focused workshops to address post-pandemic learning gaps.

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**Impact Across Washington**

Science on Wheels is more than a program—it's a lifeline for schools with limited resources. Last year:

- **114,000 learners served** across 120 school districts.
- **80% of in-person programs** and **93% of virtual workshops** delivered in low-income communities.

Educators report that students are more engaged, confident, and able to connect science to real life. One survey response summed it up:

*"This hands-on immersive learning brought science to life for all of our pre-K through 8th grade levels, sparking curiosity and deepening understanding of STEM concepts—an experience we wouldn't have otherwise been able to provide."*

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**Voices from the Classroom**

Three educators shared powerful stories:

- **Trish Beathard**, Superintendent of Brinnon School District:
  *"We're an hour from civilization. When Science on Wheels comes, it's a day of real excitement. You'd hear kids asking, 'What's next?' and 'When are they coming back?' It's a gift for our rural community."*
- **Shawn Kocher**, Principal at Woodmont K-8 in Federal Way:
  *"My students light up with joy. For many, this is their only chance to experience science beyond paper and pencil. It empowers them and builds inquiry skills."*
- **Jenny Malwitz**, STEAM teacher at Robertson Elementary in Yakima:
  *"I had no training when I moved into the STEAM role. Science on Wheels gave me ideas, resources, and hope. The digital workshops were a lifeline—I ran 22 classrooms through them."*

Students echoed this enthusiasm in a video shared during the webinar:

*"I like doing science experiments. It's fun. You can actually interact with the science and see it happening. It makes me feel more confident."*

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**Challenges and Advocacy**

Despite its success, Science on Wheels faces funding challenges. **Braden Sigua**, Government Affairs Manager at PacSci, explained:

*"State funding allowed us to serve 52,000 students for free last year. But in 2025, we saw a cut, and funding expires in June 2026. Without legislative support, thousands of students could lose access."*

Braden urged attendees to join advocacy efforts during the upcoming legislative session:

*"Science on Wheels is a need, not a nice-to-have. Help us remind legislators of its value."*

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**Looking Ahead**

Holly outlined ambitious goals:

- Serve **every low-income elementary school in Washington**.
- Expand resources for multilingual learners and pre-K students.

- Align programs with **Next Generation Science Standards** and real-world STEM careers.
- Continue innovating with new curriculum and technology.

Educators added their wish lists: more staff development, tighter alignment with grade-level standards, and access to classroom materials used during workshops.

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**Closing Thoughts**

The webinar ended with a call to action: advocate, share, and support Science on Wheels. As Arik reminded participants:

*“Each one of us has the right to feel safe and valued. Together, we will fight for a world in which true educational and economic equity exists.”*

For more information or to join the advocacy coalition, visit **pacificsciencecenter.org** or **educationvoters.org**.