



STEM EDUCATION

**Building Partnerships:
For our Children and
the Future of our Nation**

STEM Forum – Susan Helms: Keynote speech

General Susan Helms gave the keynote speech at the STEM Forum on May 24th. “STEM” stands for science, technology, engineering and math.

She spoke about the importance of an early appreciation for STEM education. She discovered she had an aptitude for math when she was about 7 years old. Her father was in the military, and her mother was a 6th grade teacher, who would get a job teaching wherever her husband was assigned. Gen. Helms was praised for her academic achievements, not treated as “weird”.

She sympathized with the teachers in the audience, saying that when she was teaching Aerospace Engineering at the Air Force Academy, she couldn't always tell if some of her students were “getting it”. At one point she discovered one of her less-than-stellar students working for NASA in a critical position. She certainly hoped that at some point he did “get it”.

She is very proud of the people she commands, and noted that there is a growing need for intelligent, highly trained employees from the STEM fields.

One follow-up question she was asked was, what was your favorite moment in space? She responded that, although she made 4 or 5 trips in the space shuttles, her favorite experience was spending 6 months living aboard the International Space Station. She (an Air Force Colonel, at the time), an Army Colonel and a Russian Cosmonaut, who was the mission commander, spent 5 months training together, then 6 months living together. The 3 of them had to rely on each other for all of the basic necessities of life. They all trained on emergency systems, but each had specific responsibilities. For example, Uri was the chef, and Gen. Helms, who is not a medical doctor, played one in space.