

I AM STEM

Manuel Martínez

Manuel Martínez, a graduate of CMSD's MC2 STEM High School, double majored in software and mechanical engineering at Cornell University and works as a Senior Software Engineer at Airbnb. He believes that to be successful you must exercise your own judgment in your decisions, value education, and be determined to continue growing. He says there is a lack of Latinos in STEM and how important it is for the Latino community to become more involved.

What advice would you give to elementary or high school students and even to yourself if you could return to that stage of your life?

It would be the same for me and for the students, it would be to align your talents and your passions with the career that you will eventually decide to follow and the only way to do that with certainty is to do internships. It is a very easy way to discern if you will like it or if you will be interested in the day-to-day work in that career. That comes back to meeting people who can help you. It does not have to be something formal, it's just about shadowing, so you connect with someone who is in that career and you can follow them and see if you like it.

The other thing that I think is very important is to start investing, and when I say invest, I mean in every way, an example would be to invest in oneself. If there are extracurricular things that interest you, you must pursue them or develop those interests because it becomes much more difficult later on to get that experience. Lastly, if you feel that in your living conditions you can not find the balance you need to do well in your studies or other goals, it is possible to seek help and not become complacent with your situation.

What does STEM mean to you?

For me, it represents human curiosity. All these disciplines are based on curiosity and the scientific process, and the beautiful thing about them is that the most recent advances in these disciplines have driven us forward as a species. Even more important than that, STEM represents opportunities. I feel with certainty that my life, as good as it feels now, could have taken a very different and much more difficult direction if I hadn't been able to develop in these disciplines. I feel that for our people, Latinos, it is an incredible opportunity that is not being exploited. I have realized that everywhere I have worked in my time in the industry, I am almost always the only Latino. Sometimes I hear mention of a Latino who works on a team far far away.

We need to find a way to get more involved and grow our presence in STEM because STEM is guiding our future and we have no authority right now over the future of the human race more or less, and I feel like that leads to many socioeconomic, value, and cultural issues at the end of the day. It is like an alarm that we must act on because if not, we will miss our chance.

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The NeoSTEM Ecosystem is a collaboration of organizations throughout Northeast Ohio who partner to improve STEM educational opportunities for all students. Formed in 2014, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem's goals are to improve meaningful STEM learning opportunities for all students in the Northeast Ohio region. As one of 94 ecosystems operating as a part of the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem holds regular virtual and in-person meetings to learn about what community educational needs are and to develop solutions for those needs. For more information, please contact us at info@neostem.org.

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