December 18, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Safer Science Summit, held at the University of Cincinnati. I am an educator that works in both K-12 and college settings, I have managed a college machine shop, designed STEM facilities used by K12 Science & Technology teachers, taught in an Industrial Arts wood shop, and coordinated a K-12 makerspace. In each of these environments, safety is essential to sustaining meaningful, hands-on learning. However, our teacher preparations and professional development programs rarely support this critical specialist area.

The Summit provided me with invaluable guidance on chemical storage and risk assessment practices that are directly relevant to the spaces I work in. For example, I gained clarity on the safe handling and storage of common K-12 laboratory chemicals such as hydrochloric acid, sodium hydroxide, ethanol, and copper sulfate, as well as the importance of segregating acids from bases, flammables from oxidizers, and ensuring proper ventilation for volatile substances. I recognized the need for dedicated flammable storage cabinets, acid-resistant shelving, and secure labeling systems — practices that are sometimes overlooked in makerspaces and wood shops where finishes, adhesives, and solvents are used alongside traditional science materials.

As a Technology Teacher and Instructional Coach, the Summit helped me see how safety must be integrated into everyday instruction. The modules on chemical storage, the expanded demonstrations of safer alternatives to high-risk experiments, and the role-based breakout sessions gave me practical strategies I could immediately apply. I now approach my STEM coaching with a sharper eye for risk assessment, ensuring that teachers I support feel confident in their content delivery and lab management.

Beyond technical content, the Summit fostered a community of practice where educators across disciplines — from biology to engineering to art — could share challenges and solutions. This collaborative environment reinforced that safety is a shared responsibility and that leadership in this area can ripple outward to transform entire school cultures.

For these reasons, I believe the Safer Science Summit is critical for teachers in Ohio K12 and beyond. It empowers educators with practical tools, builds confidence in managing complex learning environments, and ultimately protects the students we serve. I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in then summit, and I strongly recommend continued support for this program, including funding through the Ohio EPA grant to expand teacher access.

Thoughtfully,

Aaron Straus

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2025 NSF Research Experience for Teachers, Participant