

COVID Pandemic Exposes Racial Divide in Technology and STEM Education in Black & Brown Communities Across the U.S.

Jackie Smalls of Code.org says on Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie that technology firms can make a difference by providing free Wi-Fi in all communities

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Listen to [Code.org](#) Executive Jackie Smalls on Let's Talk STEM With Dr. Calvin Mackie



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“

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Jackie Smalls

On the new episode of the Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie podcast, Jackie Smalls, Chief Programs Officer at Code.org, talks about the racial divide in STEM education and technology. She says the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the gap between STEM learning in White communities versus more limited opportunities in many predominantly Black & Brown schools across the country.

“In terms of the gaps, we knew gaps existed, but I think the pandemic just really exposed how big those gaps were and who actually has access,” Smalls tells host Dr. Calvin

Mackie. “And it's a shame. We shouldn't have to park a bus in a neighborhood to make sure that all students have access to WIFI. It baffles me how we think that this is not something that should be free and accessible to everyone.”

Calling out technology companies, Smalls says if they want to make a difference in our society, they should be providing Wi-Fi everywhere.

In a conversation with Dr. Mackie, the topics include what it takes to overcome roadblocks to excelling in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields; why it's critical for Black & Brown students to have access to STEM learning; and the important role that mentors play in encouraging STEM careers.

"I always mention that I went to a HBCU (Historically Black College & University), and actually that's the first time I saw a Black woman lead a biology department," Smalls recalls, noting that the professor convinced her to engage in STEM. "I always thought about teaching, but I didn't necessarily think about STEM. I was at South Carolina State on an ROTC

scholarship and they came to me and also said, 'If you change your major to engineering or science, we'll actually give you more money. We'll cover your room and board.' "

With the expanded scholarship, Smalls shifted to pre-med biology as her major. After graduating, she was an environmental scientist in the U.S. Army. Today, she says, people must understand their opportunities: a software development bootcamp can launch a \$90,000 a year career. "It's a matter of the education of our community, knowing those opportunities."

But racial barriers are real. "I had a student tell me that she walked into a college computer science class, a Black girl...The professor, came to her and said, 'Are you in the right class?'"

At code.org, "we are trying to make sure computer science is accessible for all students," says Smalls. The nonprofit is dedicated to expanding access to computer science in schools and increasing participation by young women and students from under-resourced communities.

"You're teaching a society," lauds Dr. Mackie. "I believe you have a voice that every mother and every father need to hear because it's credible, it's transparent and it's authentic."

Enjoy their enlightening conversation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07fd36KOaSg>

(For interviews with Dr. Mackie, please contact Michael Frisby at 202-625-4328 or mike@frisbyassociates.com)

The graphic is a promotional poster for a podcast. At the top, it says "LET'S TALK STEM WITH DR. CALVIN MACKIE" in white text on a dark blue background. Below this is a white microphone icon and a "LISTEN NOW" button. In the center, there is a portrait of Dr. Calvin Mackie on the left and a circular portrait of Jackie Smalls on the right. Below the portraits is the "STEM GLOBAL ACTION" logo with the tagline "inform • engage • inspire". At the bottom right, it says "FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST JACKIE SMALLS CHIEF PROGRAMS OFFICER CODE.ORG". The background features a blue brick wall and a molecular structure at the top.

ABOUT STEM GLOBAL ACTION

Dr. Calvin Mackie founded STEM NOLA in 2013. The New Orleans non-profit is committed to expanding STEM education, especially in communities of color. In July 2021, Dr. Mackie launched STEM Global Action (<https://stemglobalaction.com/>), a campaign and network pursuing STEM education for children, parents and communities. His initiatives have impacted more than 100,000 students, 20,000 families and 5,000 schools across the U.S., and in five countries. An archive of Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie podcast episodes is at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_UPXIrgkzwsXFiefgOpgYIUNzD-T3iaw

The STEM Global Action website includes:

STEM Global Action Today (<https://stemglobalaction.com/stem-global-action-today/>), a newsletter with comprehensive articles on some of the most important issues related to STEM, and takes readers into the lives of STEM educators and their extraordinary students, who will be the STEM leaders of tomorrow.

STEM Global Action Data Center (<https://stemglobalaction.com/stem-data-center/>), a one-stop resource library for studies, reports, video presentations and news coverage about STEM.

Michael K Frisby

Frisby & Associates

+1 202-625-4328

mike@frisbyassociates.com

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