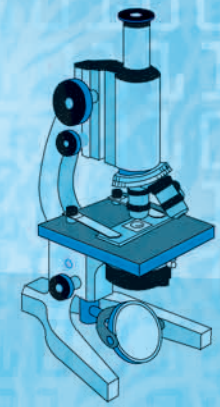
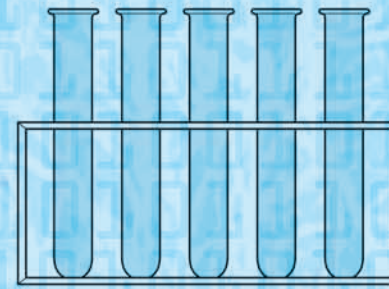


Connecting the dots for education in STEM ...
it's not just for boys anymore!



EDUCATION SECRETARY SPELLINGS talks about

GIRLS, and MATH, and SCIENCE, and the FUTURE.

by Lisa Dewey



During the National Summit on the Advancement of Girls in Math and Science, Meghan Christine Miller (left) and Lizzie Dement (right) presented Secretary Spellings with a framed print of a Girl Scout ad to encourage girls in science, technology, engineering and math. (The presenters are from the Girl Scouts of Citrus Council; the ad was produced by the Ad Council in partnership with GSUSA.)

Girl Scouts is where she learned to talk, according to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. “I sold a lot of cookies with my best friend, Joanne Scofield. We’d sit in a booth in front of K-Mart on Saturdays, and we also went door to door,” she says. “I always had to be the talking person and Joanne kept up with the money and the bookkeeping. She went on to study business, and I’m still talking.”

One of the significant subjects Secretary Spellings is talking about these days is closing the gender gap in math and science by encouraging girls to take more courses in school to prepare them for future careers in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Following the National Summit on the Advancement of Girls in Math and Science—which brought together the Department of Education in partnership with Girl Scouts of the USA, the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and Sally Ride Science—we met Secretary Spellings to get her talking about girls and math and science.

Q: What are the obstacles that must be overcome to turn the tide on the lack of girls’ participation in science, technology, engineering and math?

I think many parents don’t have a real understanding that math and science are the new currencies—that’s where the jobs are going to be. There’s a huge need for this generation to know a whole lot more about math and science than I do as a mom, or most of those from my generation. Seventy percent of parents think kids get the right amount of math and science in their schools ... wrong, wrong, wrong. So we have real work to do demanding more thoroughness, more quality, and more focus on these subjects in our school systems.

I also think there’s kind of a cultural acceptability about, in particular, a lack of math skills: the “I can’t balance my check book” sort of thing. As if we would go around bragging, “I can’t read.” It’s kind of been okay, and almost cute, to be math illiterate.

Q: If lack of awareness and a general “cute” stigma are the obstacles, what are the opportunities?

The good news about education is that people support it. They believe in opportunity and there’s a lot of goodwill and

many initiatives going on in the business, philanthropic, and the volunteer communities around these issues. The bad news is it’s a thousand flowers blooming: there’s a lack of connectedness and no strategy. I think the federal government can do the job of coordinating and leveraging so we can get cross-pollination. And together we can be more effective than we would be independently.

I also think we really need to be working from a set of facts about what the issues are, what the problem is and what we can do about it to have some good effect. One of the action items out of the National Summit is that the Department of Education is updating our research about girls so we can understand what’s effective and what isn’t.

The National Summit brought together some great partners and thinkers whose strengths we can really leverage to a greater extent for girls. You put a bunch of women in the room together and they can get some stuff done.

Q: What particularly excites you about what Girl Scouts is bringing to the table as a partner with the Department of Education?

A network of grassroots support, national penetration and involvement, goodwill throughout the country, a level of trust—all of those things make the Girl Scouts a perfect partner in this effort.

We plan to build on the work you’ve already done: your 75 activities in STEM, your *Girls Go Tech* website, your ad campaigns. You’re ahead of us, so we’re going to build off of that. We’re going to make the website part of the bigger cause and add depth and richness to it so that it includes information from all the National Summit partners.

Q: You’ve mentioned your own eighth grade daughter wondering how algebra matters to her life. What did you say to her?

You can’t just say, “90 percent of the future jobs are going to require...” to a 13-year old girl. We have to show the connect-edness, the application: it’s what you need if you’re going to have a successful life personally, or develop new technologies, or find the cure for cancer—that kind of thing. We also need to put a face on it. Carol Bartz, chairman, president and CEO of Autodesk, Inc., one of the world’s leading employers of engineers, has this kind of background and now does

this ... astronaut Sally Ride did this and look at the cool stuff she can do and does. People who are fun, interesting, exciting—that really speaks to young girls. I think making it real for kids is the key.

Q: And what would you say to the nearly one million volunteers who work with girls in Girl Scouting—how would you encourage them in their work with girls in this area?

This is a journey—and this is the way the school world is, too—this is ongoing. Find the teachable moments, as we call them in education, to tie in math and science. This message can be embedded in a lot of activities that Girl Scouts do. Be ever vigilant.

I also want to say thank you. Knowing how my own life was influenced by people like that—Girl Scouts is where I learned how to partner with friends and work together, where I learned about communication and being bold. These skills are rooted in my Girl Scout experience and are clearly things I’ve carried through my life. I’m glad these volunteers are still out there today working with girls throughout the country. I honor what they do.



Secretary Spellings today, and as a young Girl Scout.

Secretary Spellings grew up in Houston, Texas, and has a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Houston. She served as associate executive director of the Texas Association of School Boards before becoming a senior advisor to Governor George W. Bush. On January 20, 2005, she was confirmed as the U.S. Secretary of Education. She has a daughter in high school and a daughter in college.

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