

APR. 4-10
2008

Volume 27
Number 7

215-238-1450

philadelphia
bizjournals.com

\$3.00

PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

OP-ED

Girls tech skills need nurturing

A not-so-funny thing is happening on the way to the technological revolution.

Girls show plenty of interest in technology and are more likely to create their own Web sites or blog more than their male counterparts. But whether gender stereotypes are coming into play or if there is some other explanation, the fact remains — that early interest isn't translating into a female presence in vitally important technology careers.

Consider:

■ Women hold just 27 percent of the jobs in computer and mathematical occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the Philadelphia Metropolitan Statistical Area in 2006, there were 56,074 male computer specialists, compared to 22,058 females, or 28.2 percent.

■ Other career specialties show extreme splits toward male workers, according to Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board data. For example, there were 28,266 male engineers in the area, compared to 4,617 women, a mere 14 percent. In mathematical science occupations, there were 3,325 men and 1,785 women, or 34.9 percent.

■ Girls were just 15 percent of the students taking the advanced placement computer science exam in 2006, according to the National Center for Women & Information Technology. There was a 70 percent decline between 2000 and 2005 in the number of incoming undergraduate women majoring in computer science.

■ In 2004, women completed 58 percent of all bachelor's degrees, but just 25 percent of the computer science degrees, according to the Institute of Education Sciences. And while women completed 45 percent of all doctoral degrees, women were responsible for less than a third of the chemistry, computer sciences, mathematics, physics and engineering degrees.

Girls Exploring Tomorrow's Technology (GETT) began in Chester County in 2001 as a response to the under-representation of young women in the computer and information technology fields.

On March 29, GETT events occurred simultaneously in Chester County and Philadelphia, where it was sponsored by the Life Science Career Alliance.

About 130 girls in grades 6-12 visited the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia to view hands-on demonstrations in graphic design, robotics and forensics. Kiosks provided tech-related information, a career fair and summer job opportunities.

Cultural cues often drive female students to want to be the next Beyonce, Tyra Banks or a sport star — not the next Lisa Nutter, who is president of Philadelphia Academies, or Mary Sue Bell, a NASA planetary geologist, who were speakers at the event.

The girls who attended GETT got to see that technology isn't for geeks. In short, the talent is there. We just need to foster it.



* GUEST
COMMENT

Nadine
Lomakin