

Closing the Engineering Gender Gap

Brittni Beers-Branco, Vice President, Global Human Resources, Weir ESCO

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In Oregon, men are 2.3 times more likely to work in STEM jobs than women, according to The Status of Women in the States, a project of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. This trend echoes across the country. Women are less likely to work in STEM occupations in every state, according to the same project.

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math, and STEM occupations are growing much faster than others in the last decade. They're also a major contributor to the growth and stability of the U.S. economy, according to the project.

At Weir ESCO, a global leader in engineering, we're part of that growth. While we're proud to see our field of work making an impact, we're dedicated to making that field more equitable. In Oregon, just 28% of people who work in STEM are women. We want to change that. Encouraging more women to pursue STEM careers from a young age means a cultural shift in schools, homes and the workplace.

That's why we've set ambitious five-year goals. We've set initiatives to attract more diverse employees, and we're creating internal growth opportunities for those new team members. From coaching and mentoring, to flexible hours and groups like our Women's Network, there are ways we will better support women in the STEM workplace.

Weir ESCO is not alone in this journey. The work of local K-12 schools, universities, nonprofits and government grants can all help make STEM more diverse. But there is power in numbers. Partnering together will help us tackle the STEM gap.

It's not a question of ability. Girls and boys do not differ much in their math and science abilities in K-12 education, according to the National Girls Collaborative Project. But they do differ in their interest and confidence in STEM subjects. Girls and boys' participation in higher level math and science is similar in high school. It's in higher education that the gap really presents itself -- by then, men earn 81% of engineering degrees.

Intercepting young women as they choose what to study in college isn't enough. Women need to see STEM as an opportunity from the time they are young.

How can we ensure girls feel just as confident as boys in STEM?

We can end false stereotypes that girls just aren't as good at science and math. We can educate young women about what tech really means -- that it includes engineering, design innovation, cutting-edge robotics and automation. We can make STEM classrooms and workplaces more welcoming for women and offer the job opportunities they deserve.

Because fewer women than men pursue engineering in higher education, it can be a challenge to find and hire them. If we can encourage newer generations of women to go after their STEM interests early, we can change that. We're proud of the strides we've made to make engineering a more inclusive and appealing field. And we're here to say we're working hard to still do better.

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Weir ESCO

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