

Governor's Council on Women and Girls

Subcommittee on Education & STEAM

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 26th, 2025 | 3:00 PM

Microsoft TEAMs Virtual Meeting

I. Welcome

- a. Tracy T. Opoku (Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz's General Counsel) called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm. Opoku announced that Paul Lavoie, the gentleman who typically runs the meeting, has taken up a new career opportunity so she will be running these meetings for the time being. Opoku continued to say that this meeting would be an informal roundtable discussion to let everyone get to know each other and see what the different organizations are doing to create STEM pipelines for women and girls so everyone can best support each other and their initiatives.

II. Connecticut Technology Council

- a. Represented by Elizabeth Durgan, the Program Coordinator for Women of Innovation with the Connecticut Technology Council. Durgan said their high school scholarship awards event has some finalists this year who are women with submissions in STEM-related subjects that have accomplished great things in the STEM field. The event was initiated around 2007 before there were many events recognizing women in leadership like there are today.

III. Connecticut Higher Education

- a. Represented by Jennifer Delaney, employee of the Office of Higher Education. Delaney's program is the Alternative Route to Teacher Certification, which is a hybrid graduate program that has so far created over 5000 teachers. This program is the shortest pathway available in the state to becoming a teacher. It offers eight programs, three of which are in STEM. In the past three years: 33 of the 57 Science graduates have been women, 10 of the 32 Math graduates have been women, and 5 of the 17 TechEd graduates have been women. The \$7,000 program is rigorous and accredited. Opoku asked how long the program was, Delaney said it's eight months of instruction but a nine-month program due to orientation beginning earlier. Irene Parisi asked how recruitment occurs for the program, specifically for those who aren't connected to education. Delaney responded that they rely heavily on word of mouth.

IV. FIRST Robotics Programming - ReadyCT

- a. Represented by Lisa Nollman, is the FIRST Robotics Statewide Coordinator at Ready CT. A grant from the Manufacturing Innovation Fund from the Connecticut Office of Manufacturing has helped to support and grow FIRST robotics teams in Connecticut. FIRST is a Robotics Program for pre-K-12th grade with a range of

programs that all use robotics and are age appropriate. It is used to try to get kids interested in STEM and build skills for that entire field. The programs start when the kids are young, which Nollman mentioned was before kids were aware of gender stereotypes surrounding STEM, and they hope to keep the kids enrolled throughout middle school because they lose a lot of kids at that age. Students don't have to start the program while they are young, though. Last year, the teams were made up of roughly 32% of girls, and that didn't change by age. There's a long-term study currently being conducted that says girls are 2.5% more likely to take an engineering course or major in engineering if they participate in the program. Delaney inquired about the mentorship aspect of the program, and Nollman said the mentors (all with relevant experience) consist of parents, friends, and businesses.

V. Connecticut State Department of Education

- a. Represented by Irene Parisi (Chief Academic Officer) and Jennifer Michalek, who were introduced by Charlene Russell-Tucker. Parisi started, saying that they try to create creative, intentional pathways for girls, and all learners in the K-12 system. Their foundation is their high-quality curriculum. They have an Equity and Mathematics Position Statement stating their commitment to ensuring that all students, particularly girls and members of underrepresented groups, have access to high quality mathematics education. Michalek then said that they want to ensure that girls and all students see themselves as math people. Parisi said that although most people do not think of agriculture when they think of STEM, they have twenty AG centers across the state where the students incorporate new technology and research into different things and how they work with the animals. Through this, students are being exposed to high demand STEM fields and build pipelines for themselves in these fields and career opportunities. Parisi then mentioned the Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) that are a critical piece of the pipeline and in them they try to really grow the representation for girls in them. They have a web page called women and girls in STEM that provides resources, mentorship opportunities, and STEM career pathway information specifically designed to support female students in their STEM journey.

VI. Computing Challenge 2024 Update, ReadyCT

- a. Represented by Bri D'Alessio, the Project Manager for STEM Initiatives at ReacyCT and Project Lead for Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz's Computing Challenge. D'Alessio took over project management of the Computing Challenge this year from the Department of Education. D'Alessio mentioned 30 projects were recognized at the recognition event at the end of May, this year. 22 of said projects were submitted by young women and girls or were from teams that included girls. Additionally, D'Alessio mentioned the support from Jackson Laboratory, which provides an achievement award each year for students coming from alliance districts with projects falling under a specific category. 2 out of the 3 projects that Jackson Laboratories recognized this year were submitted by women. There has historically been a rise in the number of submissions by women each year, but this year it was almost identical to the amount from last year. This year was the first year an all-girls school participated, though.

VII. EdAdvance

- a. Represented by Taylor Van Antwerp, an employee at EdAdvance. Antwerp said that EdAdvance is one of the five or six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in the state, and they work with the public-school districts and the communities that they serve. Works in the Northwest region of the state. One of their programs allows students at public school districts that do not have the infrastructure or teacher qualifications to teach dual enrollment courses (specifically in the manufacturing engineering pathway) to attend a center in Torrington where they can engage in coursework through CT state and take courses in the manufacturing engineering program. Students can enter the program during any grade in high school, but if they start as freshman, they will have the opportunity to earn their associate's degree in manufacturing engineering by the time they graduate high school. This past year, Antwerp said they had around 15 female students from 8 different school districts in the program, and many of which were freshmen and sophomores who are planning on continuing with the program. This year, they should have around 20 female students with their program. Out of the 8 career pathways offered, the manufacturing program is the one that boys and girls alike are the most interested in.

VIII. Little Scientist

- a. Represented by Heidi Gold, Founder of Little Scientist. The company offers science curriculum from pre-K through 8th grade used not only in this country, but also in Japan as they work with the largest private education institution there. Since Covid, the focus has been on giving inner city children the same opportunities that privileged students are afforded. In 2020, Connecticut was the state with the largest achievement gap, so Gold wanted to give back to low socioeconomic, underprivileged students in the inner cities. Gold is also on a lot of different committees to help women and girls in the STEM field.

IX. STEM Alliance of Connecticut

- a. Represented by Cheryl Tokarski, trying to build STEM Alliance of Connecticut currently. It is meant to build a network of collaboration among STEM education throughout pre-K-12th grade and create a curriculum based on foundations from play-based learning. The planning group for this consists of many of the leaders of the teacher organizations throughout the state such as the Computer Science Teachers Association, Connecticut Science Teachers Association, and Connecticut Enterprise Architecture.

X. Connecticut Invention Convention Program

- a. Represented by Kerry Macfarland, the Director of Operations for the Connecticut Invention Convention Program. The program brings innovation education to K-12 students across the state through various avenues. They offer a lot of in-school programming, along with community programs and homeschool programs. The program is about students identifying problems in their lives and going through the invention process (which Macfarland said was naturally a STEM process). At the state finals last year, 54% of finalists were females.

XI. Announcements

- a. Elizabeth Durgin (Program Coordinator for Women of Innovation with Connecticut Technology Council) announced that they are currently taking in

registration for an awards event where high school students receive scholarships.
The event is in Bristol, CT, on October 28th, 2025, from 4:30 pm to 7:00 pm.

XII. Adjournment

- a. Opoku adjourned the meeting at 4:00 pm.