

## GHS Course Draws Girls to Technology

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A little more than three years ago, when Fred DiMenna was interviewing for a job as a technology teacher at Greenwich High School, someone asked him what he would do to get more girls interested in technology courses.

At that time, about 95 percent of the students in the technology department, which includes classes such as woodworking, metal shop, transportation and graphic communications, were boys.

"I didn't have any brilliant ideas," DiMenna recalled.

He got the job anyway. And this year, thanks to a new course DiMenna introduced at the high school, the proportion of girls in the technology department has climbed to 20 percent.

The class, called World of Technology, is geared specifically toward girls and was designed by the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund. With support from the State Department of Education, CWELF introduced the course at Manchester High School in 1996 and began promoting the class to school districts around the state.

Eight high schools, including Greenwich, now offer World of Technology, and four others plan to introduce it next fall, said Krystin Horrocks, a gender equity researcher at CWELF who helped design the class.

World of Technology is a survey technology course. CWELF offers broad guidelines for the class, but at Greenwich High it includes units on transportation, woodworking, architecture and graphic design as well as a section in which students create water- and air-propelled rockets.

What makes the class attractive to girls, several educators said, is that guidance counselors and schedulers make sure the majority of students in it are female. At Greenwich High, one section of the class has 12 girls and five boys. The other is all female.

The result is that girls who are interested in technology but would have felt intimidated in classes that DiMenna admits are "typically 16 or 17 boys and one girl" have signed up in droves. Two more sections are scheduled for next semester.

Sophomore Kathryn Bannon, 15, said the fact that the class was mostly girls made her more comfortable.

"We can come in and joke around. We can be more social," she said. "I think (the fact it's all girls) has a lot to do with it."

DiMenna said he's even noticed a difference between the section that has five boys and the section that has none.

"The boys are still trying to take control," he said. "It's just the more aggressive nature they have. (In the all-girls section), rather than work as individuals, they'll work as a group. The competition seems to be gone."

That is consistent with what CWELF surveys have shown for many years. But the surveys also show something else: Girls who take World of Technology are more inclined to enroll in other technology courses, even classes that are male-dominated.

Bannon said she plans to sign up for an introductory graphics class either next semester or next year. That is music to the ears of CWELF and state officials, who see the class as a way to encourage girls to pursue technology-related careers.

"Technology is where all the jobs are," Horrocks said. "We emphasize getting the skills to pay the bills."

According to a survey Horrocks did in 2000, 44 percent of girls who took the class said it made them consider careers they had not previously thought about. Moreover, 47 percent of girls said after taking the class that they were interested in a technical career, compared to 34 percent who said so before taking the class.

"Once they get into the (technology) department, they stay in the department," Horrocks said.

Greg Kane, a consultant on technology education with the state Department of Education, offered similar reasons for supporting the course.

"We know where the careers are," he said. "And, speaking as the father of four girls, it's just the right thing to do."

Indeed, the class is as much about empowerment as it is about gaining technical skills. DiMenna periodically brings in professional women from male-dominated professions as guest speakers, just as CWELF's guidelines recommend. And regardless of how interested they are in the class's subject, many of the girls said they enjoy having a class where they are with other girls.

"With boys, you always have to be careful around them," sophomore Kaltrina Djema, 15, said. "This way, we don't have them around, pushing us to go faster."

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