



# Girls of Promise

WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF ARKANSAS

Since 2000, the WFA's Girls of Promise program has introduced thousands of eighth-grade girls across Arkansas to information about careers in areas related to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) while giving them the opportunity to meet with women professionals for greater understanding of their own potential and power. These events encourage girls to pursue academic excellence in their high school and college years. Educators from around the state recommend high-achieving girls to attend and travel with them to this day-long conference focused on the importance of higher education and working hard to achieve their potential, or "promise."



Attendees get to meet other girls like themselves and realize that it's okay to be a bright, motivated girl with big dreams. Every year at Girls of Promise conferences, Arkansas girls meet and learn from women with amazing careers, such as scientists, astronauts, physicians, computer systems engineers, and others. The first Girls of Promise conference was held at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock and has now expanded to include: Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, NorthWest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville and South Arkansas Community College in El Dorado.



The Girls of Promise program aims to encourage girls at a time in their life when they tend to lose interest in science. Eighth grade is a pivotal age when girls begin to internalize negative stereotypes that discourage academic achievement and denigrate those who do not conform to peer expectations and social pressures. During high school, fewer girls than boys enroll in advanced science and math courses. Frequently, those who do express interest in these disciplines are discouraged by teachers, counselors, family or friends who may not view these areas as viable fields of study for girls.

The Girls of Promise program congratulates girls for their current success and future potential and gives girls the chance to learn about what they can pursue if they aim high and continue to achieve. What's more, when girls meet women in successful roles they see that - with hard work and support - careers in these fields are attainable and rewarding.

In 2005, the WFA mailed out evaluation forms to alumnae who participated in Girls of Promise conferences between 2001 – 2004. Respondents were asked to report on their current grade point average, their continued commitment to STEM-curriculum education and any impact on their current academic status or class choices from participation in Girls of Promise. A cumulative return rate of 72% of forms provided the following statistics:

- 83% indicated that the Girls of Promise conference affected their high school experience by sparking interest in math, science and technology related classes; gave them confidence; influenced their choices and "empowered" them to follow their dreams
- 92% indicated that the Girls of Promise conference increased their understanding of setting goals; increased their desire to attend college and exposed them to new opportunities.

The WFA seeks to grow the Girls of Promise program to additional sites throughout the state in the coming years to introduce 8th grade girls to professional women role models from an array of non-traditional, science, technology, engineering and math fields and to inspire girls to see the "big picture" and prepare for their future.