



Empowering Our Girls

By Educator Barnes – March 8, 2020

I recently attended a program where students received awards for exhibiting certain behaviors. I noticed the majority of students who earned behavior awards were girls. Normally, this would be the moment that I, mother of two sons, would have expressed frustration about how boys are overly chastised about their behavior. I would have emphasized that boys being active does not equate to poor behavior.

This time, I thought about the implications for the girls. Is this school trying to promote the narrative that girls are only good at being sweet, quiet, and kind? Probably not. That would be ridiculous. However, it makes me wonder how educators are lifting up and encouraging girls in other aspects of school.

In addition to attending this program, I also had another encounter that bothered me. A parent expressed frustration about her daughter being too scared to sign up for a STEM club at her school. The daughter saw the sign-up list was all boys. Although this child loves STEM and does a lot of STEM activities with her parents at home, she did not feel that she could sign up for the club. The daughter even tried to get a female friend to sign up for the club with her; the friend thought the idea was absurd.

Today is international women's day. This day is about women's rights and women's empowerment. How can we better empower our girls to pursue activities they enjoy even if they are seen as a boy activity? How can we empower girls to be confident and bold about being good at math or science? How can school leaders create spaces where there is equity in recognition students receive? If we don't answer these questions now, we risk having fewer empowered women in the future.

It all comes down to being intentional. If we want girls to feel safe to pursue any dream or interest they have, they must have exposure to women who are doing what they desire. When historical figures are highlighted in school, educators must ensure just as many women are highlighted in the lessons as men. If we want girls to consider STEM careers, they have to see more than a female math or science teacher. They need exposure to women in various STEM professions. Because intersectionality is important, if the girls are of color, educators must seek out women of color in these fields.

No girl should feel like a STEM club is not for her. No girl should feel her purpose is to only have good behavior at school. No girl should feel like she should not raise her hand to answer a math question she is certain she can answer. What are we intentionally doing to support and empower our girls not only on International Women's Day but throughout the school year? If the answer does not readily come to mind, then I'm guessing some changes need to take place.