# Inaugural Girl STEM Conference Seeks to Inspire, Empower Female Students

*Lynwood* – Seeking to inspire female students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the Lynwood Unified School District held its inaugural Girl STEM Conference at Lynwood's Bateman Hall on April 20.

The conference, attended by more than 150 female LUSD elementary-, middle- and high-school students, featured motivational speakers and videos, workshops and hands-on activities assisted by Lynwood and Firebaugh high students in biomedical and engineering career programs.

"The goal of the Girl STEM conference is to educate our female students on the wide range of STEM courses available to them through our PLTW (Project Lead The Way) programs and introduce them to successful women in STEM," LUSD Superintendent Paul Gothold said. "This is a tremendous event and we hope to see it grow."

Tables with PLTW students from Lynwood and Firebaugh high schools displayed 3-D printers, fingerprint scanners, solar-powered car chargers, heart monitors, puzzle cubes and a Rube Goldberg machine designed by three female Lynwood High engineering students.

Lynwood High engineering teacher Kristen Symer said she hoped the hands-on activities showed how fun and rewarding high school STEM courses can be. Lynwood Unified partners with Project Lead The Way – the nation's leading designer of STEM curriculum – to provide the courses.

"These are the only three girls in our engineering class. All the rest of the students are boys," said Symer as her students demonstrated a complex machine to LUSD elementary school students. "By taking STEM courses, girls can excel academically, apply to prestigious universities and qualify for higher paying jobs."

Stephanie Aceves, who works for auditing firm Ernst & Young cyber-security division, gave a keynote address describing how her ability to write computer code as a USC student led to a career as a "white hat" hacker, who attempts to penetrate EY clients' security systems to expose weaknesses and prevent potential catastrophic break-ins by cyber criminals.

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"I love my job!" Aceves said. "I want to challenge you today, as you go through your workshops, to imagine yourself being in these positions, working jobs that can transform your life, that are fun and exciting."

Jeri Lynn Metzger, an operational engineer for Northrop Grumman, and Cathalina Juarez, a workforce development manager for NASA/JPL, also addressed the Girl STEM students.

After the introductory session, students broke out into groups and attended workshops that discussed the importance of networking, how to obtain money for school scholarships and the struggles women face in college and careers. Four members of the Society of Women Engineers USC talked to high school students about the immediacy of pursuing STEM careers.

"This is a dream come true for me," LUSD Board President Alma-Delia Renteria said. "We are committed to eliminating the gender gap, empowering women to step and take control of their future."

Outside the conference, students lined up to take pictures posing as "Rosie the Riveter," the iconic figure representing American female wartime production workers. The imagery proved effective to Firebaugh High juniors Kelly Gonzalez and Giselle Villanueva.

"Gender roles shouldn't matter," Gonzalez said.

"Women are strong. We can do it!" Villanueva added.

### PHOTO CAPTIONS

**GIRLSTEM1**: Students experiment with a device that inflates balloons at Lynwood Unified's inaugural Girl STEM Conference held at Bateman Hall on April 20. The event sought to inspire more than 150 female students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies.

**GIRLSTEM2**: Firebaugh High juniors Giselle Villanueva and Kelly Gonzalez get in the spirit during Lynwood Unified's inaugural Girl STEM Conference, held on April 20 at Lynwood's Bateman Hall.

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