

GEMS PARTICIPANTS NOW LOOKING TO STEM CAREERS



Students in William Fremd High School's Building Construction program work on a wall at the construction site in Palatine, Illinois, November 16, 2021.

When Mikayla Rau was in fifth grade, her mother approached her about a program at Conant High School. The program, GEMS (Girls in Mathematics and Science), had the purpose of showing young girls what careers were available in various science and mathematics fields.

"My mom had heard about it and said, 'Hey let's check this out,'" said Rau. "My friend and I both liked science so we decided to go. We loved it."

For more than 10 years, District 211 has hosted a GEMS weekend during which girls in junior high can work together with their peers, as well as high school STEM students, on various experiments and projects. The girls also hear from women in various STEM fields.

Not only did Rau attend GEMS in fifth grade – she returned every year through middle school. When she entered freshman year at William Fremd High School, her developed passion for engineering led her into multiple courses in the school's

applied technology department.

Now in her senior year, she is very active in the building construction program and says she plans to pursue a degree in construction management.



Schaumburg High School senior Madison Dohrn conducts some final adjustments to her Computer Aided Manufacturing class.

Across the District, Schaumburg High School senior Madison Dohrn tells similar story. It was through the GEMS program, Dohrn says, that she saw new choices for her future.

“GEMS helped me see that engineering was an option for me,” she said. “It made things seem more accessible, and it was done in a fun way that kept my interest. It made me think that this was something I wanted to keep doing.”

That is exactly what she did. Following four years of STEM and Applied technology courses, 2022 Schaumburg graduate Dohrn will begin working on her mechanical engineering degree at Iowa State University this the fall. She said all the programs and courses she has taken since her first interaction in GEMS helped ready her for the future.

“One thing that is helping me prepare for college is getting to use all the different machines,” said Dohrn. “Iowa State has a new innovation center that has anything you can think of. To use them, it helps understanding them before getting there.”

Rau encourages more girls to consider attending GEMS in middle school, continue the coursework in high school and consider fields where females may be underrepresented.

“This program will open their eyes,” Rau said. “Our society says girls should have jobs like doctors or lawyers. It’s not the gritty work. Talk to your counselors, talk to your applied tech teachers, get in this hallway.”