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**[Getting more girls to study math, tech
Panel planning to discuss old issue of disparity
with boys](#)**

- [Dan Fost, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)
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For all the attention focused in recent years on the problems of getting more girls and women interested in science, math and technology, advocates say there is still a long way to go.

A 2002 study from the Department of Labor's women's bureau found that only 10 percent of engineers across the country are women, according to Donna Milgram, executive director of the National Institute for Women in Trades, Technology, and Science, a group based in Alameda.

Milgram will participate in a panel discussion in Alameda Tuesday night on the subject of "Women and Girls in Science, Math and Technology."

"There's still a big disparity between the percentage of women in science, engineering and technology versus the percentage of men," Milgram said. "I think there has been a tendency to define certain things as masculine and feminine. Science and technology are defined as masculine."

Milgram will be joined on the panel by Ellen Spertus, a computer science professor at Mills College and part-time software engineer at Google; Margaret Torn, a geological scientist at Lawrence Berkeley Lab; Neveia Chappell, product marketing engineer for Agilent Technologies; and Violet Votin, a recent graduate of Stanford University in cell biology.

Tuesday's event is sponsored by the online auto insurance company Esurance, and hosted by Girls Inc. of the Island City.

"We try to give girls the opportunity to get away from stereotyping, and give them opportunities to learn things at their own pace," said Girls Inc. Development Director Kristin Butler.

"At our computer lab here, they don't have to compete with boys to get on computers like they do at school.

"There's definitely still a feeling girls have that they can't be good in math because they're a girl," Butler said. "We try to let them know they can be good at math if they want to, and we show them that math can be fun, and it's not boring."

Milgram's organization works on developing curriculum that makes math appealing to girls. She said some of the challenges stem from habits induced in early childhood.

"It's important for girls to play with Legos and chemistry sets and develop spatial relationships and problem-solving skills," Milgram said. "It's also really important that the Legos appeal to them."

At Lego stores and on Lego's Web site, most of the items involve trucks or soldiers, as opposed to houses or things that would appeal to girls.

Milgram also cites robotic education.



"Most of the curriculum for robotics has robots engaged in competitions, and often they're monsters," she said. "Monsters tend to appeal to boys, and competition tends to be a male learning style. You can take robotics, have the robots be animals and engage in performance art, and that is going to appeal to girls.

"It's not nature. It's nurture," Milgram said.

The distinction is important, she said, because women can bring an important perspective. For instance, she said, when Bernadine Healy became the first woman to head the National Institutes of Health in 1991, she required all clinical studies that affected both genders to include women. Many studies hadn't.

Tuesday's event will be from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Girls Inc. Meyers Center, 1724 Santa Clara Ave., Alameda. Tickets are \$10 at the door for adults (club members and nonmembers) and \$5 for teens.

For information, contact Butler at (510) 521-1743 or kbutler@girlsincislandcity.org or visit www.girlsincislandcity.org

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