

To Whom It May Concern:

As a female engineer, my career choice can sometimes feel like somewhat of an anomaly. While writing, politics, social issues, and traveling have had a strong presence in my life, the engineering field was the obvious choice for the direction to take my career. My passion for science and math started at an early age. Before I entered into the formal schooling system, my mom peaked my curiosity of the natural world by helping me put together bug collections. Our parents took the family on camping trips and made almost yearly trips into Yellowstone National Park. My aunt would send gifts of science kits rather than dolls.

As I entered into first grade at Arrowhead Elementary, I carried that sense of inquisition that my family instilled into my mind with me. Throughout elementary school, math concepts came easily for me and Miss Frizzle continued to be my idol. It was not until high school, however, that the thought even occurred to me that my love for science and math could translate into a meaningful career. I was prompted from some direction, either from family members or teachers, to enter into a pre-engineering-type of class associated with a larger association called Project Lead the Way. I was told the class would take the math and science concepts I had learned throughout my education and apply them to real-life problems. I was told the class would involve a large amount of creativity and ingenuity. Interested by the idea of math involving creativity, I decided to skip the sewing class all my friends were taking and sign up for the Project Lead the Way class.

What resulted from the class was more than I could have ever expected. Fueled by an excellent teaching staff and class assignments that forced out of the box thinking, pre-engineering quickly became one of my favorite classes. In the two years I was involved with Project Lead the Way, I was introduced to some of the technical tools such as AutoCAD that are key in the industry. Volunteering at the "Chicks Dig Science" events meant gaining valuable community involvement, while watching science and engineering related TED talks during breaks kept the concepts we were learning throughout class relevant. Now, as a recent college graduate and young engineer, I can say without a doubt that my decision to enter into Civil Engineering would not have been made with such ease if it were not for Project Lead the Way.

Having just volunteered at the MathCounts competition in February, it is clear that the young population is only getting more advanced and at younger ages. As Project Lead the Way continues to grow in the school system, from high schools to middle schools to elementary schools, young students can make the connection between math, science, and potential career—a connection I only made once entering into the program, and in turn has led to the professional opportunity most are not lucky enough to experience.

*Sarah Plath*