



AAUW advocates increased support for and protection of programs that meet the needs of girls and women in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, including

at the same level as boys. These messages they receive during their K–12 education play a large role in the decisions that students make later in life.

Gaps in women's pursuit of STEM fields continue into secondary studies. Though girls' participation and achievement in math and science courses is comparable to boys', male students are still far [more likely](#) to enroll in engineering or AP computer science courses. In 2020, only about [34%](#) of students who took the AP computer science exam were female. Girls' participation in high school is critical to their pursuit of STEM in higher education—for example, female students who take AP computer science in high school are [five times more likely](#) to major in computer science in college. Stereotypes, gender bias, and the sometimes-hostile climates of STEM departments, however, continue to block women's [participation and progress](#).

Slow Progress in College

Women make up the [majority](#) of students enrolled in all sectors of higher education and earn the majority of postsecondary degrees. Yet, women's underrepresentation in STEM continues through to their postsecondary studies. In 2018, women earned [53%](#) of STEM degrees, but the bulk (85%) were in health-related fields. Women earned only 22% of engineering degrees and 19% of computer science degrees that same year. Community colleges also offer a range of STEM programs leading to associate degrees and certification, but women remain concentrated in programs for traditionally female occupations like nursing, education, and cosmetology.

In fields like computer science and engineering, women [more often](#) face harassment and gender bias both on campus and professionally. As fewer women study and work in some areas of STEM, these fields tend to perpetuate exclusionary, male-dominated cultures that are not supportive of—or even hostile to—women and particularly [women of color](#).

Improving Opportunities in STEM

There are many [ways](#) to create a lifelong pathway of op-