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HEADLINE: Foundation — Address issues of status when girls are young

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The **Women's Foundation** of **Minnesota** brought a wake-up call about girls to Rochester on Tuesday.

The foundation presented results from its study, "Status of Girls in **Minnesota**." Among the findings, the study says girls are more likely than boys to consider committing suicide, high school females are studying more than their male counterparts but performing worse on standardized tests, and women are more likely than men to suffer poverty as they enter adulthood.

After the community presentation, a few members of the business community had a focus group to discuss how communities can offset these issues. The results of that discussion will be released later this year, along with those from the entire 15-city "Road to Equality" tour.

Carol McGee Johnson, the foundation's vice president of community philanthropy and programs, said the issues must be addressed when girls are young and still developing.

The amount of women entering poverty compared to men and the suicide rates of girls particularly troubled Larry Kent, executive director of Boys and Girls Club of Rochester. According to the 2005 **Minnesota** Student Survey, 27 percent of girls questioned said that they had considered suicide.

The club offers the "Smart Girls" program, which works with girls to help them develop positive self-images. The girls work with an adult mentor in the six-week program.

Sarah Kelling-McCormick of the Rochester Downtown Alliance said hearing about the low self-esteem rates troubled her as well. She said a school-focused initiative, possibly an after-school program dealing with those issues, could benefit young women.

"There's so much room for girls to grow, especially in a community as prosperous as this one," Kelling-McCormick said.

Another issue brought up in the study referred to the disparity in wages between women and men, which McGee Johnson said occurs because many women are pushed into lower-paying fields.

Margo Herman knows that all too well. As executive director of the Rochester Area Math Science Partnership, she has worked to promote science and engineering careers to area girls. She is concerned that girls study harder than boys but score worse on standardized tests.

April Sutor, representing the United Way of Olmsted County, said counteracting these trends will involve educating both boys and girls because they both affect how the trends are formed.

"It's not just a gender problem," she said.

For more information, go to Postbulletin.com/weblinks.

Women's Foundation of ***Minnesota*** <http://www.wfmn.org>

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