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Harvard President Lawrence Summers was provocative in his recent suggestion that women may be innately inferior to men in the sciences. He spoke not only to professional women and college and graduate students, but to the K-12 girls our two organizations serve. A majority of our girls are from low-income families, many are girls of color, most will be the first in their families to attend college.

Today, few women of color are in the ranks of scientists, engineers, and mathematicians not because they are not talented, able, or hardworking, but because there has been little support for them as students to pursue their interest in the sciences. President Summers' speculation further discourages girls, reinforcing the stereotype that girls do not have what it takes to be scientists and engineers. Yet, currently the United States does not have enough scientists or engineers, so there will be many opportunities for girls to work in these fields.

If girls pursue science and engineering studies, they will have the opportunity to work as chemists, biologists, and statisticians in Boston's burgeoning biotechnology industry, an industry Harvard is eager to harness as it builds its new campus in Allston and Brighton, the very neighborhoods in which some of our girls live.

Of course many girls will pursue careers outside the sciences. But, a love of science developed during their pre-collegiate years will create informed citizens who have the scientific wherewithal to discuss stem cell research and DNA testing. When they buy a car, they will understand the effect of SUVs and hybrids on the air quality of their surrounding community. These girls will become tomorrow's interpreters of science, critical for citizens of the 21st century.

We invite President Summer to be even more provocative. Provoke young women to do well in mathematics and science so that they can swell the ranks of the sciences. Provoke organizations such as ours to capture and maintain girls' interest in science. Provoke the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to put sufficient resources into science education. Provoke K-12 schools to develop high-quality programs in mathematics and science that excite all students. We invite President Summers to be in the vanguard, promoting a new generation of scientists that will include many more women.

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