



Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys ConnectZ Program Written Testimony to the MN House Education Policy Committee, submitted January 25, 2021.

Madam Chair and Members,

As an example of closing the opportunity and achievement gap here in Minnesota, we are submitting this written testimony on behalf of the Girl Scouts River Valleys ConnectZ program.

ConnectZ is a K-12 supplemental STEM-focused education that is delivered through culturally responsive leadership and skill development to underserved and under resourced girls throughout the metro area and southern Minnesota. ConnectZ promotes college and career readiness and strengthens social-emotional development. Last year, ConnectZ served nearly 3,000 girls from low-income communities—90% of whom receive free or reduced-price lunch—and our program is provided at no cost to girls and families. Our ConnectZ programming is adaptive and remains girl-focused and girl-led, no matter where our troops are located.

Collaboration with our nearly 100 schools and community sites is the reason why Girl Scouts ConnectZ is successful. We work closely with community partners to deliver a program tailored to the needs of girls of color from low-income communities, and to identify and provide access to girls who would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in a leadership program.

In Saint Paul Public Schools, 7 in 10 of our ConnectZ Girl Scouts utilize our program exclusively and do not access any other outreach or out of school program. For them, ConnectZ is the only exposure to supplemental education, leadership programming, college and career readiness, and culturally responsive social emotional learning that they receive in high school. Our ConnectZ troops are staff-led by youth development professionals (a majority of which identify as women of color) who create customized program delivery plans for each site to meet the needs of the girls and communities. In Minnesota schools with majority white educators and administrators and during the time of distance learning—the impact of girls being able to access female role models of color and connect with peers cannot be overstated.

Girl Scouts believes in supporting and investing in girls as they take on challenges and societal barriers. ConnectZ provides exposure and access to key areas where girls of color continue to face inequity:

- Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM)
- Life Skills, such as confidence and role models of color in school settings
- Outdoor Experiences and Skills, due to the financial limitations
- Leadership and Entrepreneurship.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding racial disparities in Minnesota’s education system and how our ConnectZ program is working to combat such disparities in education and our communities. Girl Scouts River Valleys is committed to making the world a better place for **every** girl in our Minnesota communities. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out at any time to Julia Burkstaller at [julia.burkstaller@girlscoutsrv.org](mailto:julia.burkstaller@girlscoutsrv.org).

Thank you,

**Tisha Bolger**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
Girl Scouts River Valleys

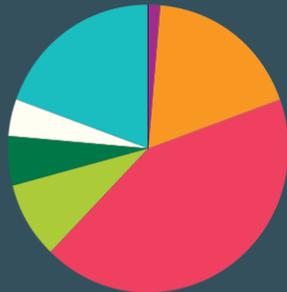
**Jasmine Graves**  
*ConnectZ Program Director*  
Girl Scouts River Valley

## GIRL SCOUTS *ConnectZ*



Girl Scouts ConnectZ gives more girls the opportunity to participate by bringing programming to girls during/after school, within their neighborhoods, and in partnership with other youth organizations. This helps eliminate cultural barriers as well as barriers like cost and transportation.

### DEMOGRAPHICS



- 1.5% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 18% Asian
- .2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 42.6% Black/African American
- 8.7% White/Caucasian
- 5.5% Multiracial
- 4.2% Other Race
- 19.3% Unreported

23.5% reported Hispanic/Latino  
76.5% reported Not Hispanic/Latino



**2 IN 3**  
girl participants will be first generation college students.

- 74%** of high school seniors who participated in ConnectZ planned to attend college.
- 73%** of girls say they are more confident in school because of Girl Scouts.
- 90%** of girls participating in ConnectZ qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch.

“**I am proud of myself** for being able to express my feelings, be a better friend, take responsibility for my actions, and getting into leadership, as I grow older.”

–*ConnectZ Girl Scout*

“Please continue to fund this **essential program needed to support students** where the regular school day program is not able to meet the needs of students.”

–*ConnectZ School Partner*