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My name is Daniel Nette, and I'm a junior at George Mason High School in Falls Church Virginia and am currently serving as the robo-coach, chassis/drive train subsystem leader, and coordinator of the physical components and robot building. I learned about *FIRST* from my older brother who was a founding member of team 1418 at my school in 2004, and currently serves as Tournament Director for a *FIRST* Lego League tournament held at our local middle school.

Unlike many of my science and mathematics classes, *FIRST* provides the opportunity to apply hands-on solutions to real challenges. As we complete the challenge, we also learn valuable skills like teambuilding, communication, leadership, and especially the four elements of STEM. Through the program, I have refined my ability to seek my own solutions to problems and to develop my own desire to learn.

Working with robots has helped me learn about idea development, material properties, pneumatics, metalworking, and motors by applying concepts that I learned in the classroom to a real life problem. *FIRST* gives us a challenge each year, and then we go through the process of brainstorming, designing, prototyping, building, and rebuilding until a working solution is achieved. In addition to the process is the pressure of a six week time constraint to achieve the task at hand. I know I will encounter these deadlines and utilize these problem solving skills in my future career.

Many students involved in the program experience for the first time the importance of interaction and communication with adults such as mentors and judges. While that was not a problem for me because of my experiences in becoming an Eagle Scout, I discovered the power to spread the ideas of *FIRST* at a dinner conversation last year with a family friend who became very interested in the program. She invested in a Lego robotics kit and took it on a mission trip to a school in Rwanda so that the students there could begin to learn about robotics. She then went on to serve as a judge at a recent FLL tournament and hopes to become a mentor.

As a student, I've always had an interest in mathematics and science, but it wasn't until the last few years, through my experience with *FIRST*, I realized that I would like to pursue a career in STEM. I plan to apply to Virginia Tech and hope, if accepted, to be able to work with robots to solve real-life challenges.