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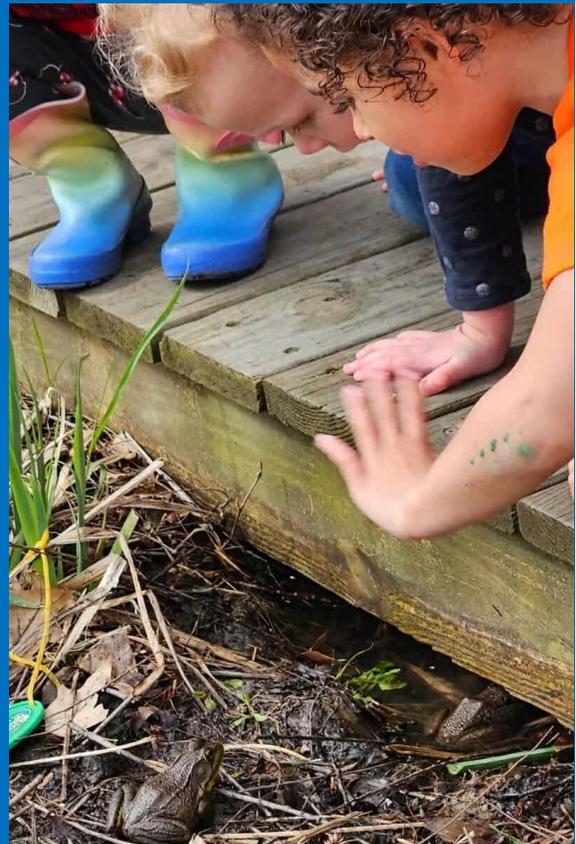
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IEIN 36-2258522

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025



## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

After much thought and reflection, I made the decision to retire from my position as Director at AAUW Preschool effective June 30, 2025. While this decision is bittersweet, I am filled with immense gratitude for the incredible experiences and relationships I have had the privilege of being part of during my 25 years here.

The joy of seeing young children and families flourish, along with the collaborative spirit among colleagues, has made my work deeply rewarding. The opportunity to contribute to a nurturing environment for young minds to grow and learn has been a privilege that I will always cherish. The impact we have made together will always remain one of the highlights of my career. It has truly been my professional and personal honor to serve in this preschool community.

After an extensive search, it is with great pride and joy that I announce the selection and Board of Directors' approval of Denise Romero as the new Director of AAUW Preschool effective July 1, 2025.

Miss Denise has been an integral part of our preschool for nearly 23 years, serving as a dedicated and beloved teacher. She brings a deep knowledge of child development, a strong connection with our families, and a thorough understanding of our program's values and traditions. I have every confidence that under her leadership, AAUW Preschool will continue to thrive and uphold the high-quality standards it has maintained for over 70 years.

As I step down from my role as Director and transition into a new role on the AAUW Preschool Board of Directors, I am fully committed to supporting Miss Denise through a smooth and successful leadership transition.

We continue to enhance our beloved preschool program to maintain our long, rich reputation in the community.

*Ann Perkins*

## **WHO IS AAUW?**

### **Our History**

AAUW Nursery School was founded in 1953 by the American Association of University Women who realized a need for a quality preschool in the area. They formed a small, licensed, non-profit, parent-cooperative nursery school where young children could learn, grow, and thrive. As the school grew, we became independent of the founding organization, but retained our original name and purpose. Since 1970, we have been in a preschool designed facility in a quiet residential neighborhood on the northwest side of Waukegan. In 2013, AAUW Nursery School officially changed its name to AAUW Preschool.

### **Our Mission**

Our mission is to provide a comfortable, yet stimulating learning environment which values each child as an individual. We challenge each child to reach his or her potential by encouraging the development of social, emotional, intellectual, perceptual, language, and large and small motor skills.

### **Our Commitment to Equity**

We are proud to serve a diverse population of children and families here at AAUW Preschool. AAUW Preschool staff and administration are committed to continued professional development in Implicit Bias training, to help identify ways that we can work better to strongly incorporate culturally responsive practices so that each and every child and their families feel and know they are welcome here.

## **WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT**

### **We are a Parent Cooperative Preschool**

AAUW Preschool is a parent cooperative preschool, which means it is organized and administered by the parents. Every parent has opportunities during the year to help in the operation of the school. Through the cooperative efforts of parents and staff we can accomplish much more for each child. Parents are free to visit the school at any time to observe or volunteer in the classrooms.

**Families contributed 686 hours of service to AAUW Preschool during the 2025-2026 school year.**

### **AAUW Preschool's LearnScape Initiative**

AAUW Preschool's innovative LearnScape initiative is designed to foster young children's love for learning alongside a lifelong respect for nature. LearnScape includes the transformation of our traditional 1-acre playground space into an innovative nature-based outdoor classroom and creates opportunities for children to learn outside throughout their school day.

Thanks to Eagle Scout candidate Christopher Cardona from Boy Scout Troop #92 in Antioch for building a beautiful bench around one of our trees. This will be the centerpiece of our new outdoor literacy area where children can gather to read, learn, and grow surrounded by nature. Thank you!



**What is next for the LearnScape initiative?**

Through the LearnScape initiative, children learn outside throughout their school day through exploring science, motor development, and exploring the arts in nature.

*Upcoming features - A new*

- Play cabin to foster dramatic play, peer interaction leading to cooperative play, and creative and critical thinking
- Outdoor Arts Area and Theater to provide spaces for children to create artwork with natural materials

**2024-25 STAFF**

**Director – Ann Adkins**

Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education  
 Teacher at AAUW since 1997  
 Director at AAUW since 2006  
 In Early Childhood Education since 1991  
 Parent of 3 AAUW Preschool Alumni

**Assistant Director & Teacher – Jodi McLellan (Aug-Apr)**

Master’s degree in Early Childhood Education  
 Teacher and Assistant Director Since Winter 2024  
 In Early Childhood & Elementary Education for 11 years



**Office Registrar – Emily Frievalt**

Education in communication, public relations, business, and hospitality  
 At AAUW Preschool since Summer 2019

**Teachers**

Lilianna Abarca (Assistant) – Voyagers (all year),  
 Pioneers (Sept-Jan)  
 Diana Baldez – Explorers  
 Runa Barr – Pioneers (Apr-May)  
 Jessica Castillo (Lead, Co, & Assistant) – Discovery,  
 Voyagers, Odyssey  
 Loran Dawson – Discovery (all year), Odyssey (Dec-  
 May)  
 Idalia Garza, Alumni Parent – Odyssey (Aug-Nov)  
 Alondra Herrera (Assistant) – Adventure

Brandi Larry (Aide) – Discovery, Adventure, Explorers,  
 Voyagers  
 Jodi McLellan – Pioneers & Voyagers (Aug-Apr)  
 Denise Romero, Alum & Alumni Parent – Scouts,  
 Pioneers, Odyssey  
 Andrea Salgado (Assistant) – Explorers  
 Amand Wagner, Alumni Parent – Adventure  
 Laura Swanson, former AAUW Preschool Student  
 Teacher – Substitute Teacher  
 Meg Brown, Alumni Parent – Substitute Teacher

*Teachers complete ongoing professional development in CPR-First Aide, Mandated Reporter, food handler, social-emotional teaching practices, trauma-informed care, and best practices in early childhood education.*

**2024-25 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Leslie Foss (Co-President), Teresa Pajor (Co-President), Kristen Cade (Treasurer), Veronica Knudtkins (Secretary), Lauren Sczygielski-Anders, Janice Bly, Molly Escobar, Maria Horvath, Jessica Hoselton, Thomas Knudtkins, Stacey Remsing, Isaac Salgado, Nolberto Zaragoza

**BY THE NUMBERS**



## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

6 Preschool classes offered

- Explorers (2-year-olds)
- Discovery (3-year-olds)
- Voyagers (3 and 4-year-olds)
- Adventure (4-year-olds)
- Pioneers (3 and 4-year-olds)
- Odyssey (3 and 4-year-olds)

72 children enrolled during the 2025-26 school year

16 children attended Scouts (20 to 36-month-old parent-child program)

29 children attended 4 sessions of summer camps

51% of families received financial assistance

### Little Free Library Addition

AAUW Preschool now hosts a Little Free Library! It is fully stocked with children's books and parenting books. Little Free Library is a great way to borrow books for free, return them when you finish, and load them with loved books of your own. The Little Free Library app makes it easy to find little library locations near you. You can get directions, save your favorites, track the libraries you visit, and even earn badges! App: <https://littlefreelibrary.org/app/>. We are grateful to Roy Baker for building this addition!



### Program Refocus for 2025-26

After 18 years of service, AAUW Preschool has made the thoughtful decision to pause the Preschool For All (PFA) Program for the 2025–26 school year. Our focus will shift toward expanding and deepening our nature-based curriculum as part of the LearnScape Initiative. Through this transition, we remain committed to fostering high-quality early childhood education while strengthening community partnerships. By investing in our LearnScape Initiative, we will create even more opportunities for children to learn through exploration, discovery, and connection with the natural world.

As part of this transition, we are actively seeking to build and strengthen community partnerships that expand access to our programs. It is our priority to ensure that all families—regardless of financial ability—have the opportunity to attend AAUW Preschool and benefit from the high-quality, innovative early learning experiences we provide.

By realigning our resources and cultivating new collaborations, AAUW Preschool is positioning itself to maximize impact, broaden equity in access, and ensure the sustainability of programming that reflects our mission and values.

### Thanks to the time, talent, and dollars of donors, parents, and community partners, AAUW Preschool organized and presented:

Third Annual Fall Festival  
49<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Carnival  
Community Parades & Events  
Open Houses  
Preschool Palooza  
Family Nights (family yoga, storytelling, special guests, art experiences)

### OUR THANKS

Thanks to the support of our donors, AAUW Preschool provided **scholarships to 4 children**. Thanks to the Lake County Community Foundation for their grant of \$7,821 to support AAUW Preschool programming, family events, and operations.

### Grant Funders:

Early Childhood Block Grant – Preschool for All  
Lake County Community Foundation  
Morrison Family Foundation

### Accreditations and Licensures:

NAEYC  
Illinois ExceleRate Gold  
The Department of Child and Family Services

