

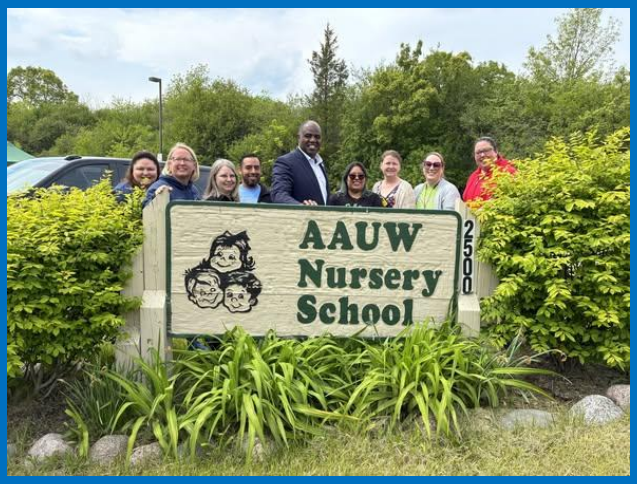
Wonder... Explore... Discover

AAUW Preschool

ANNUAL REPORT 2026

AAUW Preschool
2500 N. Northern Avenue
Waukegan, IL 60087
(847) 623-0550
Email: office@aauwpreschool.org
Website: aauwpreschool.org
Follow us on Facebook & Instagram
@AAUWPreschool
IEIN 36-2258522













DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As I reflect on the 2025–2026 school year, I am filled with gratitude, pride and excitement for the future of AAUW Preschool. Having been part of the AAUW Preschool family for 24 years, it has been a privilege to grow alongside our school community and contribute to the education and development of our young learners. This school year was especially meaningful as I stepped into the role of Director. I am proud to have successfully completed my first year as Director and to continue serving a preschool that holds such a special place in my heart.

One of the highlights of this year was a tremendous honor bestowed upon AAUW Preschool by Senator Adriane Johnson. Our school was recognized as one of the **"**30 Wonders of the 30th District.**"** I was honored to attend the recognition event and receive an award on behalf of our preschool. This acknowledgment reflects the dedication, hard work and commitment of our school community to providing a nurturing and enriching early childhood education experience for the children and families we serve.

As I look back on this milestone year, I am reminded that the strength of AAUW Preschool lies in its dedicated staff, supportive families and the children who inspire us every day. I am grateful for the trust and support I have received as I transitioned into this leadership role. Together, we continue to build on the strong foundation of our school while embracing opportunities for growth and continued excellence.

Thank you to our staff, families and community partners for being an important part of the AAUW Preschool family. I look forward to another year of learning, growing and creating meaningful experiences for our children!

Denise Romero, Director

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 360 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 a grant from Faith in Place, two gardens were revitalized into native Illinois pollinator gardens; one designed for sunny conditions and the other for shade. Featuring a variety of plants, these gardens invite children to engage with nature through an array of colors, scents and textures while learning about native plants, pollinators, and the ecosystems around them.



We are grateful to Faith in Place for helping bring these outdoor learning spaces to life!

What is next for the LearnScape initiative?

The transformation of our outdoor space is an ongoing journey. As we continue to expand opportunities for outdoor learning, new features will encourage imagination, collaboration, creativity, and discovery.
Upcoming additions include:

- Nature-Inspired Play Cabin: A dedicated space for dramatic and imaginative play, encouraging peer interaction, cooperative play, creative thinking, and problem-solving.
- Outdoor Arts Area and Theater: Spaces where children can express their creativity, experiment with natural materials, create artwork, and explore music, movement, and dramatic expression.

Through these enhancements, LearnScape will continue to evolve into a dynamic outdoor classroom where children can wonder, explore, discover, and learn in meaningful ways.

Program Refocus for 2025-26

During the 2025-26 school year, AAUW Preschool made a strategic shift to focus exclusively on morning preschool programming while expanding and deepening our nature-based curriculum through the LearnScape Initiative.

By realigning resources, strengthening community partnerships, and investing in our unique outdoor learning environment, we are positioning AAUW Preschool to maximize its impact, promote greater access and equity, and support the long-term sustainability of a program that reflects our mission and values.

2025-26 STAFF



Director – Denise Romero

Associate in Arts degree in Early Childhood Education
Teacher at AAUW Preschool since 2002
Director at AAUW Preschool since 2025
AAUW Preschool Alum
Parent of 2 AAUW Preschool Alumni

Office Registrar – Emily Frievalt

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

Teachers

Diana Baldez – Explorers
Runa Barr – Voyagers, Discovery (Co, Assistant)
Loran Dawson – Voyagers, Discovery (Co, Lead)
Alondra Herrera – Adventure (Assistant)
Denise Romero, Alum & Alumni Parent – Scouts, Explorers (Lead, Assistant)
Amanda Wagner, Alumni Parent – Adventure (Lead)

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.

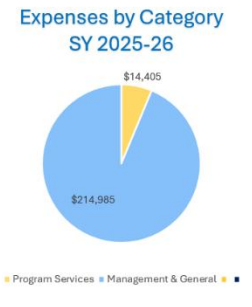
2025-26 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Leslie Foss (Co-President), Kristen Cade (Treasurer), Veronica Knudtkins (Secretary)
Ann Adkins, Lauren Sczygielski-Anders, Janice Bly, Maria Horvath, Jessica Hoselton, Thomas Knudtkins & Isaac Salgado



BY THE NUMBERS:





PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

4 Preschool classes offered

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

52 children enrolled during the 2025-26 school year
9 children attended Scouts (20 to 36-month-old parent-child program)
17 children attended 4 sessions of summer camps (sold out in 2025-2026)
18% of families received financial assistance



Morrison Foundation – An Alumna Connection

A special highlight this year was discovering that Michelle Luu, a representative of the Morrison Family Foundation, is an AAUW Preschool alumna!

Michelle enjoyed returning to her former preschool, reconnecting with childhood memories, and seeing firsthand how AAUW Preschool has grown. During her visit, she learned more about our nature-focused accomplishments, the LearnScape Initiative, and our vision for the future.

We are especially grateful to the Morrison Family Foundation for its continued interest in and support of AAUW Preschool. It is wonderful to see former students reconnecting with the preschool and helping shape its future!

Bringing Our Community Together

Thanks to the time, talents, generosity, and involvement of our parents, donors, volunteers, and community partners, AAUW Preschool continued to bring families and the community together through:

- 49th Annual Spring Carnival
- Community Parades, Open Houses & Family Events



These events provide opportunities to celebrate childhood, strengthen community connections, introduce new families to our program, and build lasting support for AAUW Preschool.

OUR THANKS – MAKE A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

The generosity of donors and supporters makes a meaningful difference in the lives of the children and families we serve.

Thanks to this support, AAUW Preschool provided **scholarships to 7 children,** helping families access the benefits of a high-quality preschool experience.

We extend our sincere gratitude to:

- Morrison Family Foundation - $5,000 grant supporting nature-focused programming and the LearnScape Initiative
- Grand Foundation - $5,000 grant to supporting AAUW Preschool and its mission
- Anonymous Donor - $2000 grant supporting the purchase of a lawnmower and mulch to maintain and enhance our outdoor learning environment.
- Mother's Trust Foundation - $2,100 grant supporting several Summer Camp children.
- Faith in Place - $500 grant support for the revitalization of our native pollinator gardens.

Together, we are growing more than a preschool – we are cultivating a love of learning and a connection to nature that will last a lifetime!

Accreditations and Licensures:

NAEYC
Illinois ExceleRate Gold
Department of Child and Family Services







