



WORDS TO THE

WISE²

WOMEN IN SEARCH OF EDUCATION AND EQUITY

Volume 30, Issue 5

February, 2026



MISSION

To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

Winchester, Virginia, Branch
<http://winchester-va.aauw.net/>

PRESIDENT

TESS THOME (757-870-8176)
(thometess@gmail.com)

VICE PRESIDENT - PROGRAM

REBECCA BRONSON (540-931-1467)
(rbronson123@gmail.com)

PROGRAM ASSISTANT

REBECCA EBERT (540-532-1250)
(rebert2@verizon.net)

VICE PRESIDENT - MEMBERSHIP

LAURIE GAULKE (908-591-7595)
(laurie.mg96@gmail.com)

SUNSHINE COMMITTEE CHAIR

JANE PARRISH (540-667-8580)
(jmparp@comcast.net)

RECORDING SECRETARY

JULIE SAYRE (540-551-0225)
(jbsayre@mft@gmail.com)

FINANCE / AAUW FUNDS

MARSHA GOCHENOUR (540-533-8069)
(mgochen@yahoo.com)

EDUCATION / LOCAL SCHOLARSHIPS

ROSEMARY GREEN (540-539-2674)
(rglibrarian50@gmail.com)

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION (DE&I)

REBECCA BRONSON (540-931-1467)
(rbronson123@gmail.com)

WORDS TO THE WISE² EDITOR

MARTHA PRUSCH (540-729-1135)
(bmecs@comcast.net)

FACEBOOK MANAGER

PAT KADEL (717-314-4470)
(patriciakadel52@gmail.com)

NORTHWEST DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE

MARY ANNE GRAHAM (540-338-7738)
(maryannegraham@comcast.net)

February Meeting

The Shoebox Lunch
Traveling with Hope and Resilience

Sharon Dixon and Brenda Nelson, Speakers

Saturday

February 14, 2026

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

**Winchester Public Schools-
Douglas School Central
Administration Office
598 North Kent Street
Winchester, VA**

Our February meeting is in conjunction with the Winchester NAACP for the presentation of Sharon Dixon's *Green Book* program, *The Shoebox Lunch: Traveling with Resilience and Hope*. The *Green Book* was an essential guide for African Americans during segregation as folks who had moved north during the Great Migration sought lodging, food and other services when they returned south to visit relatives and as they traveled in other parts of the country where discrimination denied them the basics of comfort.

We will have a brief branch meeting before the program and tour the Douglas School Museum before the program begins at 11:00 a.m.
(See flyer on page 8.)

Board Meeting

Wednesday February 25, 2026

Zoom 6 p.m.

All members are invited to attend.
(Contact Marsha Gochenour for Zoom details.)

AAUW of VA Lobby Day

**Thursday February 5, 2026
Virginia State Capitol**

Becki Bronson and Theresa Merkel are going down the night before (February 4) to attend the pre-event briefing. There's room for one or two additional people if anyone else would like to join them. Sign up for Lobby Day on the AAUW of Virginia webpage: <https://aauw-va.aauw.net/>



Looking Ahead:

Woman of the Year

Dr. Faith Power

March 27, 2026

6:00 p.m.

Godfrey Miller Center
28 South Loudoun Street
Old Town Mall
Winchester, VA

Annual Branch Meeting

April 11, 2026

10:00 a.m.

Home of Lynn Brenneman
510 South Loudoun Street
Winchester, VA

Winchester Little Theatre

Play Fundraiser

Calendar Girls

May 13, 2026

7:00 p.m.

Winchester Little Theatre
315 West Boscawen Street
Winchester, VA

President's Message

Tess Thome

We have another exciting partnership program with the NAACP this month on February 14th! Join us at 10 a.m., 598 N. Kent Street, the former Douglas School and currently the Winchester City School offices, for a very brief branch meeting and then a tour of the Museum of the Douglas School and at 11 a.m. a program presented by Sharon Dixon and Brenda Nelson called *The Shoebox Lunch*:

Traveling with Hope and Resilience which will enlighten us on "The Green Book" which helped African Americans and others travel in the South when it was dangerous to travel. The book functioned like an old phone book but had restaurants, gas stations and places to lodge that were "safe" for people of color during segregation.

The State Conference is fast approaching April 17-18th in Glen Allen, VA: ***On the Front Lines: Defending Education and Equity for Women and Girls***. Please plan to attend and let me know if you are attending. We are part of the Host branches that are helping to arrange the conference. We will have to staff the Raffle Room, help the newest branch in VA, Fredericksburg, with the Registration, and lunch. Text me at 757-870-8176 and let me know if you are attending and if you are willing to help. It is a great way to meet people and serve while still enjoying the conference.

Please check out the calendar on this Newsletter and update yours so that you do not miss anything. There is a lot going on in the next month.

Thank you to Pat Kadel who has stepped up to be our DEI representative. And thank you to Becki Bronson for helping Pat transition into this position and for her dedicated service to this very

important mission of AAUW that is really the backbone of everything that we stand for as a group.

See you on February 14th!



Tess Thome

*President
Winchester AAUW*

Named Gift Honoree

Marsha Gochenour

Our branch has donated over \$500 to the AAUW Greatest Needs Fund in 2025 and is entitled to one Named Gift Honoree. Suggestions of members who could be recognized should be sent to Marsha Gochenour. The branch choice will be announced at the Woman of the Year reception. The honoree will also be included in the 2026 Program booklet at the State Conference in April.

Woman of the Year Reception Friday March 27, 2026

Refreshments

We have a wonderful reputation for providing delicious refreshments at our Woman of the Year reception. Let's continue the tradition by letting Marsha Gochenour or Martha Prusch know what you can provide. A reminder email will be sent out the week of the event, and a list will be posted in the March newsletter.

Suggested items are:

Small sandwiches
Fruit tray
Meatballs
Appetizers
Cookies, Brownies
Mints, wrapped
Candy, wrapped
Nuts
Cheese & Crackers
8 oz water bottles (24/pack)

Treasurer's Report

Marsha Gochenour

As of January 21, 2026:

\$599.87	Checking
141.65	Woman of the Year
0.00	AAUW Funds
282.74	NCCWSL/AAUW@SU
225.00	Dr. Amy @ SU
855.00	Orndoff @ SU
2,219.27	Froehlich Memorial Scholarship (local)
4,000.00	CD, 1-year
<u>2,213.21</u>	General Savings
\$10,536.74	Total

January disbursements: \$225.00
Woman of Year room rental;
\$500.00 to Shenandoah University
for Orndoff Memorial Scholarship;
\$75.00 to AAUW-VA Conference
for 2026 ad in program book.

CLEO

(Classy Ladies Eating Out)

Marsha Gochenour

Monday
February 23, 2026

6:00 p.m.

Café del Sol

50 Featherbed Lane

<https://delsolcafes.com/locations/winchester>



Call Marsha (540-533-8069)
if you plan to attend the dinner so
she will have a head count.

Evening Book Group

Marsha Gochenour

Monday
February 16, 2026
6:00 p.m.
Zoom



The Nature of Fragile Things

Author: Susan Meissner

This is a historical fiction novel about an Irish immigrant mail-order bride in 1906 San Francisco who discovers a web of secrets just before the devastating earthquake. The story follows Sophie Whalen as she marries a mysterious man, Martin Hocking, and forms a bond with his silent daughter, Kat. The novel explores themes of betrayal, survival, and the strength of female bonds as the lives of Sophie and two other women intertwine.

We will determine the order and location of the balance of our 2026 books (listed in our last newsletter) at our February Book Group meeting.

DEI/ Inclusion and Equity

Pat Kadel

Pat Kadel has agreed to take over as chair of this position from Becki Bronson after a transitional period.

Pat and Becki attended the January national zoom meeting on Tuesday, January 13, where attendees broke into small groups to discuss the current situation around ICE enforcement in American cities. The questions groups addressed were:

- Have you been affected by immigration policy? How?
- What sources do you get your information from?
- Is there anything that we should be doing as an organization to address what we see on the ground?

Once the main meeting reconvened, it was noted that members are acting individually and many branches have been working with immigrant groups in their own communities to help people understand their rights. This discussion was a continuation of the discussion in November about resources available to help with difficult conversations.

Other discussion noted that AAUW National has begun using the name “Inclusion and Equity” or “I and E” instead of “DEI”. Several attendants added that they have begun using that term at their local level as well. Virginia state DEI chair, Meg Tucillo, was at the meeting and advised that she has been using “Inclusion and Equity”, as well as “Belonging and Accessibility”.

The next meeting of Virginia Branch DEI/I&E chairs will be via Zoom on February 10, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. We will verify then which name we should use.



AAUW of Virginia State Conference

**April 17-18, 2026
Glen Allen, Virginia**

The Northwest District branches (Greater Richmond, Winchester, and Fredericksburg Area) are hosting the 101st AAUW of Virginia State Conference, at the Drury Plaza Hotel Richmond, 11049 West Broad Street, Glen Allen, Virginia.

Check out the state website for further details, or email Mary Anne Graham, Northwest District Representative, at maryannegraham@comcast.net for further information.

Your Help is Needed!!! Raffle Basket

Pat Kadel

Once again, our branch is preparing a gift basket to be auctioned at the Virginia AAUW Conference to be held April 17-18. Last year's *Thelma and Louise* themed basket was extremely popular, and we hope to have something even better this year.

We have agreed on a theme that will focus on Winchester and the surrounding area. Becki Bronson has donated an apple crate that we will use as our “basket”, and we hope to have it spilling over with items that showcase what's special and unique about our community.



If you have any items you might donate or even suggestions about what we might include, please contact Tess Thome, Pat Kadel or Becki Bronson. Just remember that Winchester is much more than Apple Blossom and Civil War Battlefields. We will keep members posted about specific items that might be needed.

CALENDAR

February 5	Lobby Day, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, VA
February 14	January Meeting, <i>The Shoebox Lunch</i> , Winchester School Board offices, 10:00 a.m.
February 16	Book Group, Zoom, 6 p.m., <i>The Nature of Fragile Things</i>
February 20	Deadline for March issue of <i>Words to the WISE²</i>
February 23	CLEO, Café del Sol, 6 p.m.
February 25	Board Meeting via Zoom, 6 p.m.

Sandra Pulsifer Awarded the 2026 Dr. Amy Lee Parker Endowed Scholarship.

Rosemary Green, Chair, Scholarships Committee, Winchester Branch of AAUW

I met with Dr. Deran Whitney and Dr. Cathy Shiffman, faculty in the Shenandoah University Division of Education and Leadership, on January 9, and we reviewed four applications for the Dr. Amy Lee Parker Endowed Scholarship; all applicants were women.

The award is given on alternate years to either a student in the Doctor of Education in Administrative Leadership or in the Professional Studies Certificate Program in Administration and Supervision (PSC). PSC students have previously earned a master's degree; therefore, the award is always given to a graduate-level student studying educational leadership.

The recipient this year is PSC student Sandra Pulsifer, a middle school teacher and educational leader in West Virginia. In her essay, she emphasized the importance of women in leadership, which Dr. Amy Parker fostered throughout her professional life.

Here is an excerpt from Sandra's application essay.

My professional journey in education has been shaped by a commitment to instructional excellence, equity, and the belief that strong leadership is foundational to student success. Following program completion, my immediate goal is to continue progressing into school-based administrative roles. My professional experiences as a science teacher, director of academics, faculty senate president, and student assistant facilitator have provided me with a strong foundation in instructional leadership, teacher development, and collaborative problem-solving. These roles have allowed me to work closely with teachers, administrators, families, and support services to address academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs. The Shenandoah University program has helped me further refine my leadership skills in areas such as school law, supervision, organizational leadership, and ethical decision-making, enabling me to serve schools more effectively at the administrative level. In my current role as a facilitator, I have led a struggling school in special education, which has proved invaluable. My principal has had a series of strokes and in addition, the school is under state control due to failing test scores. With my current training, I have been able to move the school into IEP compliance, served as the admin chair for all high-profile IEP/504/SAT, and served as a trusted administrator for staff and faculty. The position has truly helped me shine as a woman in leadership.

Equity and student achievement will remain central to my leadership vision. As I move up the ladder of educational leadership, I plan to work closely with students who require additional academic, behavioral, or social-emotional support. My leadership plans also include strengthening family and community partnerships. Schools do not operate without community members, and meaningful collaboration with families and community organizations is essential to student success. In conclusion, the Administration and Leadership Certificate at Shenandoah University represents a critical step in my professional growth as an educational leader. Upon completion of the program, I will be prepared to assume greater leadership responsibilities that positively influence teaching and learning, strengthen community partnerships, and advance equity within schools.

This is her email of appreciation:

Dear Dr. Green and members of the Winchester Branch of the AAUW,

I am so honored to receive the Amy Parker Endowed Scholarship! I am so happy, truly this is so special because of who she was. I have worked so hard to get to this point in my life. When my dad passed away in 2021, life's challenges almost caused me to give up, however I have never been one to let hardship hold me back. I have held leadership roles in every school I have ever worked in, as well as in the colleges I have attended, even leading a graduation. I think that leadership is in my DNA. Through sheer determination and most of all, a dedication to children, I have kept moving forward on a mission to advocate for them wherever I go.

I also want to add, this scholarship brought financial relief just in time. I was facing a choice. Because the Trump administration deleted my husband's federal division last year, I suddenly could not afford to continue my graduate work. I am so grateful for Dr. Amy Parker. I promise I will make her proud.

I would love to meet members of the branch! You are welcome to share any portion of my essay. Thanks so much from the bottom of my heart!

*Warm Regards,
Sandra Pulsifer*

Betty and Edwin Orndoff Scholarship for the Performing Arts

Rosemary Green, Chair, Scholarships Committee, Winchester Branch of AAUW

Applications for the Orndoff Scholarship are coming in now, and the recipient will be announced in late February. Applicants are graduate students at Shenandoah Conservatory pursuing degrees in the performing arts, such as piano performance, string performance, and vocal performance.



Virginia 250th Events

Becky Ebert

The commemoration of the Revolutionary War is underway on a national, state, and local level. You can learn about upcoming events on the state website, <https://va250.org>, and local events on the Winchester Frederick visitors Center website, <https://visitwinchesterva.com>

Upcoming local events in February include:

- 16 11:00 a.m. George Washington's Wreath Laying, Fort Loudoun Chapter DAR, George Washington Headquarters
- 16 2:00-4:00 p.m. Muster of Captain Mercer's Company, Fort Loudoun Site
- 16 5:00-8:00 p.m. George Washington's Birthday Celebration, hosted by French and Indian War Foundation, Winchester Brew Works, tickets required.
- 19 6:00-7:15 p.m. America 250 Book Circle, Handley Library West Reading Room. Will explore books that illuminate challenges, triumphs and vision of the early American experience. This month's selection is 1776 by David McCollough.
- 21 10:30-12:30 Poster Contest workshop, grades 3 -5, sponsored by James Wood II Chapter, SAR, Benham Room, Handley Library
- 22 1:00 p.m. George Washington's Birthday Wreath laying, Pay respects to our founding father. James Wood II Chapter SAR, George Washington Office Museum, 32 West Cork St.
- 22 2:00 p.m. Walking Tour of Revolutionary War Era buildings, starting at George Washington's Headquarters, take a walk on the South Loudoun Street corridor and learn about some of the buildings from our Revolutionary War era. Tour led by Winchester Historian Tim Youmans

December Meeting Report

Becki Bronson

Saturday, December 13, 2025, 10 a.m. – 12 noon
Benham Gallery
Handley Regional Library

Longtime Winchester Branch member, **Dr. Cee Ann Davis**, shared her vast knowledge of public health ethics, tying current developments in public health with their historic counterparts. She introduced us to the American Public Health Association (APHA) Ethics Section and its Public Health Code of Ethics. In 2019, the APHA reframed its public health code of ethics into six core values: professionalism and trust; health and safety; health justice and equity; interdependence and solidarity; human rights and civil liberties; and inclusivity and engagement.



Historically, a broader understanding of ethics may be best described as a synthesis of three underlying frameworks: the model of virtue ethics, developed by Aristotle, Kant's theory of ethical duty, and Mill's model of utilitarianism. Mix in a little Hippocratic Oath, and you have the complete framework.

Dr. Davis compared ethics and morals (social norms that change over time), offered an examination of ethics vs. law (what you should do vs. what you must do) and how these structures underpin medical decision making. Out of this framework, she noted that “principlism, the idea that relationships between parties confer moral standards when they establish roles and obligations,” is the current model for decision making. This model “creates [a] framework rather than detailed, rigid rules for handling conflicts of interest, research protocol reviews, advance directives, etc.” and that “balancing is required when principles conflict.” In this fascinating presentation, she also outlined the major principles at work in medical ethics: respect for persons, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice.

January Meeting report

Becki Bronson

Saturday, January 10, 2026, 10 a.m. – 12 noon
Benham Gallery
Handley Regional Library

Dr. Faith Power, Executive Director of the Laurel Center, offered a compelling program on the work of the Laurel Center, Winchester's domestic violence shelter. Founded in 1981, the Center empowers those affected by domestic and sexual violence by providing emergency housing, advocacy, outreach, support services, education and awareness, and works to stop the cycle of domestic and sexual violence. The Center recently expanded, with the construction of a new Emergency Shelter and Outreach Center and the renovation of a railroad freight building for use as a workforce training center for its clients. Dr. Power oversaw those accomplishments.



Dr. Power noted that while the Center's funding is presently stable, the current climate may change that status. The Center is the only domestic violence program in Virginia with a dedicated line item in the state budget. The Center currently serves people living in Winchester, Frederick, Clarke, and Warren counties and is the only organization in those municipalities to serve victims of domestic violence.



From the AAUW National Website
January 26, 2026

Statement from AAUW CEO Gloria L. Blackwell on EEOC Rescission of Workplace Harassment Guidance

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) voted 2–1 to rescind its 2024 *Enforcement Guidance on Harassment in the Workplace*—a practical roadmap that helped workers understand their protections and helped employers prevent and address unlawful harassment. The move comes as harassment remains pervasive: in FY 2024, the EEOC received 88,531 new discrimination charges, including 35,774 harassment charges — about 40% of the total — and many incidents still go unreported.

Rescinding this guidance does not change workers’ rights under federal law. But it will make those rights harder to navigate and enforce—especially given the EEOC’s rushed decision to withdraw significant guidance without meaningful public input.

AAUW’s vision is clear: every worker deserves a workplace free from harassment and retaliation, backed by strong prevention, real accountability, and robust civil-rights enforcement. This action is part of a broader pattern of weakening civil-rights guardrails in workplaces and schools. Similar efforts make it harder for people to understand their protections and for institutions to do the right thing.

Statement from Gloria L. Blackwell, AAUW CEO

Let’s be clear: workers’ rights under federal law have not changed — but the EEOC is trying to make those rights harder to use. The Harassment Guidance was a roadmap for preventing harm and holding workplaces accountable. Rescinding it through a rushed process without public input sends a clear message to workers that their safety is being treated as optional, and it makes it harder for responsible employers to meet their obligations. AAUW will keep fighting for strong civil rights enforcement in our workplaces and schools, because dignity, safety, and equal opportunity are not negotiable.

AAUW (American Association of University Women) is the nation’s leading organization for equity in higher education and women’s economic empowerment. Founded in 1881 by women who defied society’s conventions by earning college degrees, AAUW has since worked to increase women’s access, opportunity, and equity in higher education through research, advocacy, and philanthropy of over \$146 million, supporting thousands of women scholars. Learn more at [aauw.org](https://www.aauw.org).

Equal Pay Day – March 4, 2026

Find Out What it Means!



The Shoebox Lunch

Traveling with Hope
and Resilience



Presented by Sharon Dixon and Brenda Nelson

Saturday, February 14, 2026

Winchester City School Board Offices

(Former Douglas School)

598 N Kent St

Winchester, VA 22601

11:00am

Hosted by:



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540-450-3223
suzan@suzanherskowitz.com
www.suzanherskowitz.com

2400 Valley Avenue
Suite 16
Winchester, VA 22601