

Volume 61 No. 5

January 2026

Challenges Facing Education Today Meet the Superintendents

Saturday, January 17th, 2026 – 9:30am
O'Connor Woods - 3400 Wagner Heights Road, Stockton

On Saturday, January 17th in O'Connor Woods West Hall, AAUW Stockton Branch will host a discussion about the many challenges that public schools face today. Speaking will be San Joaquin County Superintendent Dr. Troy Brown, Lincoln Unified School District Superintendent Ms. Kelly Dextraze, Lodi Unified School District Superintendent Mr. Neil Young, and Stockton Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Michelle Rodriguez. After brief remarks from each speaker, a moderator will facilitate questions from the audience.

Members of AAUW, Lodi Branch, League of Women Voters San Joaquin County and residents of O'Connor Woods are cordially invited to attend.

Check in is at 9:30am with the program beginning at 10am. There is no charge for this meeting. Complimentary snacks and beverages will be available.



**San Joaquin County
Superintendent
Dr. Troy Brown**

**Lincoln Unified School
District Superintendent
Ms. Kelly Dextraze**

**Lodi Unified School
District Superintendent
Mr. Neil Young**

**Stockton Unified School
District Superintendent
Dr. Michelle Rodriguez**

President's Message



"We are more alike, my friend, than we are unalike." Maya Angelou

Hanukkah, Kwanza, Diwali, Christmas, etc., are some of the holidays observed in November and December. As families celebrate the various cultures represented by these traditional festivals, it is important to note not only the differences but the similarities as well. Most include a gathering of family and friends, parades or processions, lights and candles, traditional foods, and so on.

Most of the holidays I mentioned are observed in the United States because we are a nation that has been enriched by immigration. People from around the world have come here in search of freedom and a better life, especially for their children. Despite being in a new country, they have kept their long-held traditions, languages, and food. Immigration has not damaged us. It has made our nation a "salad bowl" of cultures and traditions. We should celebrate the differences.

There have been attempts recently to demonize immigrants and to make immigration seem like a horrible "invasion." If we continue to allow this, we will lose our international character. Asylum bans, increasing deportation and arrests, ending the policy that prohibited enforcement at hospitals, churches, and schools, travel bans from select countries, and attempting to end "birthright citizenship," have all been used to halt immigration and to remove some who are already here. The administration has used dehumanizing rhetoric to put forth these policies. Many people who have resided here for years are threatened with removal, and many others are being denied entry. These tactics are especially disturbing for children.

These policies are not who we are. The poem on the Statue of Liberty is a statement of who we are supposed to be and what we have represented to the rest of the world for generations. Have we forgotten meaning of the words, and should the "Golden Door" be closed? In the end, we are all HUMAN beings, more alike than unalike, so let's keep that door open and welcoming.

Sandra Mazzuola
President



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Mentor Program

Though our year is drawing to an end, it really is only the middle of the academic year. Our seniors submitted their college applications before the end of November and are anxiously watching their mailboxes for early decisions. First semester finals are over and they are hoping to get some much needed rest over winter break.



Our program celebrated the holidays early this year, on December 6th. We first gathered at Casa Flores in Brookside for a midafternoon meal (Dunch? Linner?). We exchanged gifts consisting of lip balms and pedicure tools. The new girls also were given the traditional first year gift of Modern Manners for Teens. This year Rosa Solis gifted bracelets made by a nonprofit which were a big hit! All examined our resolutions kept from last year and made new ones for the coming year which we will revisit next December.



After our meal we proceeded to the Stockton Sailing Club (Thanks Jennifer Reiber) to view the Lighted Boat Parade. The cold weather was made bearable by hot cocoa and the hand warmers that Sue Kenmotsu had the foresight to bring.



On December 13th our girls once again had the opportunity to help to assemble food baskets for the needy sponsored by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

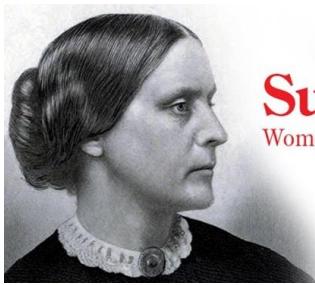
The mentors have already planned the activities for the rest of the year. Each activity has clear cut objectives leading to our overall goal: To encourage higher education and guide them to their place in our world.



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We affirm and promote the inherent
worth and dignity of every person and
are a welcoming congregation.



Susan B. Anthony

Women of Achievement Awards

SUSAN B. ANTHONY AWARD

Our very own Terri Mercer has been selected to receive a Susan B. Anthony Award from the San Joaquin County Commission on the Status of Women. The award banquet will be held February 15th at the Stockton Hilton Hotel. The reception is at 5pm and dinner is at 6pm. Tickets are \$75. If you would like to attend and be seated at the AAUW table, please send a check for \$75 to Donna Hammel made out to Donna Hammel who will then send one total check for our branch to the Commission. You must indicate your menu choice of beef, chicken, or vegan. Donna's address is 1049 Woodglen Ct., Stockton, CA 95209. Be sure your reservation reaches Donna by January 17th. Reservations made after January 17th, but before January 23rd, should be mailed directly to Victoria Shenkel at 5519 Solari Ranch Rd, Stockton, CA 95212 with checks made out to SJCCSW. Late seating will be assigned where individual spots are available. January 23rd is the final reservation date.

Congratulations Terri!

AAUW Festival of Trees

Attached you'll see a photo of the AAUW Stockton branch Festival of Trees entry, Equity through Education. The design was inspired as a reaction to threats to women's rights and to education that occurred during the spring. The American Association of University Women epitomizes the struggles for rights of women and for the rights to education in every aspect. In so many ways our branch lives the purpose of AAUW: "to promote equity, education, intellectual growth, individual worth, and development of opportunities for women and girls." Each of us members contributes in our own way to further these aims. Equity happens through education hence the tree's title.

Education is what unites us in this organization: University Women (and men who support that aim). So the tree has mortar boards with the names of institutions of higher learning from which our members graduated. These are attached by a ribbon with the school color. The tree topper has a mortar board with our branch name. On the tree, each member of our branch has a diploma with his/her name on it and a school color ribbon.

The Festival of Trees is an important way to show the community something of who we are and what we do. This year the tree focus was a reaction and celebration of Stockton Branch AAUW members. Unfortunately, for the event, our name and tree descriptor were left off the program; the lights on the tree were not connected to electricity. Our tree may not have been noticed by all who attended, but members will appreciate ourselves as a group who values education and encourages equal opportunities to education for all.



Public Policy Update

AAUW Silicon Valley Branch will host a virtual event on **reproductive rights** featuring Leah Litman, host of the popular Strict Scrutiny podcast - Thursday Jan 22, 2026 1:00-2:00pm. (Register @ https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_M2FiWXqvQqCorEAdJdFcw#/registration.

AAUW California School Board Project presents a Half Day Symposium: **Defending the Frontline of Democracy** - Saturday Jan 31, 2026 9:00am-12:30pm via Zoom. Register @ <https://us02web.us/register/qWr6jFavQbmVcE6YX1wC4g#/registration>.

- If you're ready to fight back, please join, where you will learn:
 - How the federal government's restrictive laws impact California's protective laws
 - How to effectively advocate for AAUW values with your local school board members
 - Why advocating on behalf of LGBTQ+ students is a crucial AAUW priority
 - How to support progressive school board members in conservative districts
 - How to respond to parents' concerns with accurate information
 - How to form and sustain valuable coalitions in your district with like-minded organizations
 - How to identify, recruit and support school board candidates whose values reflect AAUW California's Public Policy Priorities

Steps to Combat the Assault on Higher Education:

STEP 1: Self-Focused: Education Learn about this Administration's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" which offers preferential funding to universities if they adopt policy changes such as dismantling DEI and restricting campus governing and speech. See how universities have been responding, and read AAUW's press release opposing the compact. Read the AAUW letter urging Congress to support student parents by preserving the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program. Go to AAUW National & read the summary on the dismantling of the Department of Education - what is happening, and why it matters.

STEP 2: Other-Focused: Education & Connection Tell at least TWO other people what you have learned about the negative impacts of the Administration's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education". Tell at least TWO other people what you learned about the negative impacts of the Administration's dismantling of the Department of Education. Tell at least TWO other people about the importance of the CCAMPIS program to support student parents.

STEP 3: Politically-Focused Tell Congress to ask the Department of Education to open the CCAMPIS application so parenting students can stay in school. Go to AAUW's Two-Minute Activist page, then click on "Dept. of Ed.: Remove Barriers for Student Parents". Urge Congress to block efforts to dismantle the Department of Education's ability to do its job - advancing gender and racial equity in every classroom and protecting students' rights. Go to AAUW's Two-Minute Activist page, then click on "Congress: Ensure the Dept. of Ed. Can Serve Our Students".

For extra Action items:

Learn more about supporting college students who are also parents. One in five college students are also parents. These students juggle classes, jobs, and family responsibilities, but without reliable and

affordable child care, too many are forced to pause or abandon their education. The Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program helps remove this barrier by funding campus-based child care centers. It is problematic that the Department of Education is dragging its feet on opening the application process for these critical grants. *We need to open the CCAMPIS application so parenting students can stay in school.*

Learn more about the dismantling of the Department of Education. On 11/18/25, the Administration unveiled a sweeping plan to sidestep Congress and outsource large pieces of the U.S. Department of Education, shifting work dedicated to, among other areas, elementary and secondary education, postsecondary education and Indian education to other federal agencies." (["...administration shares new moves to dismantle more of the Education Department"](#), NPR/KQED, 11/18/25.) Under these new agreements, for example, much of the work of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, which includes managing Title I (a key federal funding stream that helps schools support low-income students), would shift to the U.S. Department of Labor, as would much of the work of the Office of Postsecondary Education. By turning over many education programs to the Department of Labor, the administration may be signaling that it places a higher value on job training and workforce development than on broad-based education (See also "...Administration Launches Plan to Dismantle Education Department," [Politico](#), 11/18/25). Funding for international research and language programs have been moved to the State Department, making them much harder to access as anti-DEI provisions have been strengthened by the designation of DEI and abortion as [human rights violations](#).

Here in California, tell the UCs to continue paying salaries for faculty hired out of the UC President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. Calling all UC students, alums, parents, and grandparents! The University of California system office will no longer pay for the UC President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, a fellowship established in 1984 to encourage more women and minority Ph.Ds to

pursue academic careers ("Inside Higher Ed," 11/5/25). Tell the UC Office of the President that you object!

THANKS FOR GIVING TEA A SUCCESS!

We had a very successful fundraiser tea in November. We netted \$12,350 after deducting expenses. That is \$2,500 more than last year's tea! Our income was higher than last year and our expenses were lower. Our fundraiser tea enables our branch to continue funding our Community Outreach Programs – Mentor, Reading is Fundamental, Delta Scholarships, Tech Trek, and our Essay Contest. Thank you to everyone for volunteering your time, purchasing a ticket, and/or making a donation.

Delta College Scholarships

Our branch donated \$6,000 to Delta College in November to fund three scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 each. We received a thank you letter from Delta College which stated "thank you for your donation to our scholarship program and your continued investment in assisting our students in reaching their educational goals." With the high cost of college our scholarships are undoubtedly appreciated.

Board to Board

A Communication from the

AAUW California Board to Branch Boards

Branch Development Peer Group meetings are scheduled for the second Tuesday of the month from September through May at 7pm.

The next Branch Development Peer Group will be on Tuesday, January 13th, at 7pm. Click [HERE](#) to register.

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Vision: AAUW will be a powerful advocate and visible leader in equity and education through research, philanthropy, and measureable change in critical areas impacting the lives of women and girls.
Mission: **AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research.**
Value Promise: By joining AAUW, you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women and girls have a fair chance.

January Calendar

| Day | Date | Time | Event | Location/Contact |
|-----|------|---------|--|--------------------------------|
| Mon | 12 | 6:00pm | January Board Meeting | Online via Zoom |
| Tue | 13 | All Day | Reservation Deadline | Betty Parsons - (408) 309-8958 |
| Tue | 13 | 7:00pm | Branch Development Peer Group Meeting | Online via Zoom |
| Sat | 17 | 9:30am | Jan. Program: "Meet the Superintendents" | O'Connor Woods West Hall |