



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release: Monday, March 06, 2006

A New Year – A New Opportunity for 7th-grade Girls in STEM *Invitations Go Out for 2006 Expanding Your Horizons™ Conference*

Westchester County – Girls across Westchester County are being invited to start the new year making a unique resolution of sorts – to keeping their career options open.

The first step is the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Westchester Branch's Expanding Your Horizons™ in Math, Science and Technology Conference, hosted together with AAUW New York City Branch and Barnard College. Letters to all Middle School Principals in the county went out this week with registration information and an outline of the third annual conference to be held March 11, 2006 at Barnard College in Manhattan.

The conference is a half day of hands-on workshops for 7th-grade girls, led by women professionals working in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) fields. The girls participate in two workshops such as: "African Game Hunt" where they will learn to play Okwe (Mancala) the oldest strategy board game in the world; or "Whodunit?" where they explore how science used at the scene of the crime trying their hands at forensic science.

The workshops are not designed to teach specific lessons. Rather, they are designed to introduce the girls to the idea that women can succeed using these disciplines in a wide range of careers. The workshop leaders serve as role models for the girls giving them an opportunity to interact with women to see that they have full, interesting lives that include careers that involve using STEM.

The girls' also participate in a "Mystery Women Game" where they try to match Mystery Women with their biographies. This activity, one of the day's most popular, gives the girls' a chance to speak with women in non-traditional STEM careers. The girls are encouraged to ask the women, who circulate throughout the morning identified only by the special hats they wear, questions about their education, background, family or hobbies. Once correctly identified the girls have the "Mystery Woman" sign her book which is turned in with all signatures for a prize.

The concept behind the game is to reinforce the idea that women and girls do belong in the "hard" sciences, that they can and do succeed.

The conference is for 7th-grade girls because studies, including "Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America" by AAUW Educational Foundation (1991) show that middle school is when girls begin to fall behind in math, science and technology. Girls begin to get the message, both overtly and subtly, that they don't belong in STEM and that it is not feminine to be smart. This message gets internalized and there is a marked drop in girls' self-perceived ability to perform in these areas. As a result, many girls do not sign up for the more advanced math, science and technology courses that they would need to enter a wide range of careers, and close the door before they have ever even considered entering.

These are the very girls that the conference hopes to attract – girls that have NOT yet considered STEM careers. Girls who are already interested in math and science are, of course, welcome. But the goal is to "expand the horizons" of young women who may not have realized the potential long-term consequences of decisions being made now.

Adults can play an important role in expanding girls' horizons and have their own workshop at the conference. Teachers, parents, guidance counselors and others participate in a town-hall discussion on how they can better support girls in STEM. It is an opportunity to speak frankly with other concerned adults about their experiences and those of their daughters.

The conference has 150 slots for girls from all over Westchester County and Manhattan and 50 slots for adults. Conference planners expect to fill all 200 slots again this year and encourage those interested to sign up early. More information can be found at www.aauw-eyhconference.com.

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The American Association of University Women, with its nationwide network of more than 100,000 bipartisan members and 1,300 branches, has been a leading advocate for equity for women and girls since 1881.

AAUW: Because Equity is Still An Issue