

23rd Annual STEAM Girls Count Conference a Success; 24th Conference Planned for February, 2021, exact date TBD.

Charmaine Klein, stepped up to Chair the 24th STEAM Girls Count Conference. All sub-chairs plan to remain in their roles for next year's Conference. Retiring program Chair, Nancy Beights, and program Vice Chair, Cathy Hackney, will assist the new Chair and with specific tasks.

The 2020 AAUW Greater Naples Branch Invitational STEAM Girls Count Conference was held February 1 at Golden Gate High School. More than twenty professionals and STEAM specialists shared their enthusiasm and expertise with 90 fifth-grade girls from Collier County Public Schools ("CCPS") along with their families who attended the Conference despite the rain. We were disappointed that we were unable to serve more girls this year, but have plans for increasing attendance next year.

This year for the first time, AAUW GNB partnered with Collier County Public Schools (CCPS), at its request, to hold the STEAM Girls Count Conference in conjunction with the CCPS STEAM Expo. The goal in doing so was to provide a broader experience for the fifth grade girls and their families. Additionally, that enabled insured transportation for the Immokalee students, teachers and families.

At the request of CCPS, no registration fee was charged for our Conference this year. We were therefore especially grateful for the generosity of those who donated to the Greater Naples AAUW Charitable Foundation, Inc. to support the conference: Arthrex (lead donor) and Kohl's, and in-kind donations by Trader Joe's of Naples, Champions For Learning, Susie Mehas & John R. Woods Properties, and Collier County Public Schools.

The program began with exciting presentations in the Auditorium, provided by CCPS, including Kate the Chemist, a highly engaging and entertaining female scientist. Following her program, the fifth grade girls attending our Conference and their families were treated to a special VIP session with Kate. At the end of the session, CCPS gave each girl a special cookie decorated as a chemistry flask.

From 10:30 - 11:30, the girls and their families participated in STEAM Village, an extravaganza of displays and activities in the gymnasium. At 11:30, AAUW GNB provided a lunch of pizza and bottled water for the girls and their families. Remaining pizza went to the adult presentation rooms.

The afternoon portion of the program involved 14 breakout sessions with STEAM experts for the girls, and two sessions for parents in a different location. The adults and families heard one presentation from Carrie Kerskie, who is a local expert on internet safety and identity theft. Champions for Learning presented a session with its Vice President, Lisa Church and a mentor and mentee to discuss the advantages of mentoring.

Fourteen area professionals, together with their Assistants, presented breakout workshops to the girls: Alicia Abbot - engineering; Dr. Bonny Eads - Optometry; Joanna Fitzgerald - Wildlife Conservancy; Jill Harvel - Cement Industries; Professor Tracy Lanham - creating computer games; Dr. Stephenie Liebler - Biomedical Engineering; Dr. Judith MacGregor - Toxicology; Dr. Denise McNulty - nursing; Adriane Rene Orion - Architecture; Shell Redfern - Graphic Arts; Dr. Barbra Reed, DMD - Orthodonture; Robin Stephen - structural engineering; Dr. Robert Tober, Noemi Garcia and Alison Avila - emergency medicine, and Dr. Amber Weinke, DVM - Veterinary Medicine.

Approximately 60 members of the AAUW Greater Naples Branch and 10 non-members served as volunteers.

STEAM Questions and Answers

How are the girls assigned to sessions?

There are multiple girls' sessions that introduce careers in science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Girls indicate choices on their registration forms. Groups are formed to include at least one of those "first choices."

Must a parent, guardian, or other adult attend the conference with the girls?

Yes, each girl must have a parent, guardian or other adult attend. We encourage dialogue between the girls and adults following the conference, and those discussions are much richer when the adults have attended.

What will the parents/guardians do while girls are in their sessions?

The adults attend the opening session in the auditorium, then additional sessions designed to help parents/guardians support girls as they move through middle and high school years.

What should the girls bring to the conference?

Girls should bring their curiosity, their ideas and their questions to share with new friends. It's also a good idea to bring a sweater! All other materials are provided.

Are teachers invited to attend the conference?

Teachers are invited to attend the Conference and may register by submitting their names on their students' registration forms.

What are the times?

The Conference begins early in the morning and ends early to mid-afternoon, with lunch provided. Specific times and location will be provided closer to the Conference.

What feedback have you received about the conference?

During the day, girls are asked to comment on the sessions they attend. At the end of the day, girls and adults are asked to complete a feedback form that is used to assess and design upcoming Conferences. The input is truly appreciated and utilized. Some comments from this year include:

From girls:

- *I had fun with you guys, and you guys are cool.*
- *Girls can do anything.*
- *It was a fun day.*
- *Girls can also do engineering.*
- *It was fun AAUW.*
- *Getting dirty is fine to learn new ideas.*
- *We learned that we need to work hard, stay focused and do something that makes us happy.*

- *I can do what I set my mind to.*
- *It was cool that all the presenters were women.*
- *It takes a lot of hard work and education to have a STEAM career.*

From adults:

- This was such a great experience; the presentations were very informative!*
- Excellent conference! Thank you very much for the opportunity.*
- Great program.*
- Valuable information.*
- Very informative; opened my eyes to things I didn't think of.*
- Very good information.*

From Presenters:

- I feel strongly about the goal and focus of this event.*
- I loved being a Presenter. What a joy!*

We look forward to welcoming 100+ more girls and their families in February 2021!