



# 9th Annual Women's Leadership Conference

## Leading with Vision, Voice and Value

March 9-10, 2026

at Ocean Place Resort and Spa, Long Branch, NJ

An event designed for women in or aspiring to positions in educational leadership



# Schedule

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## Monday, March 9

Music provided by East Brunswick High School Bella Voce: Directed by Mr. Adam Good, Accompanied by Ms. Moriah Kam

8:00 am - 9:00 am	Registration and Breakfast
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome
9:15 am - 10:30 am	Keynote Presentation - Bonnie Taylor
10:15 am - 11:30 am	Session 1
11:30 am - 11:45 am	Break
11:45 am - 12:45 pm	Session 2
12:45 pm - 2:00 pm	Luncheon/Keynote Presentation - Dr. Janice K. Jackson
2:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Session 3
3:00 pm - 3:15 pm	Break
3:15 pm - 4:15 pm	Session 4
4:15 pm - 5:30 pm	Networking Reception (Sponsored by Edmentum)

## Tuesday, March 10

Music provided by Henry Hudson Regional High School Brass Ensemble:  
Directed by Nicholas McGill

8:00 am - 9:00 am	Registration and Breakfast
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome
9:15 am - 10:15 am	Keynote Presentation - Rosa Diaz
10:15 am - 10:30 am	Break
10:30 am - 11:30 am	Session 5
11:30 am - 1:00 pm	Keynote Presentation - Carmen Agra Deedy
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Session 6
2:00 pm - 2:15 pm	Break
2:15 pm - 3:15 pm	Session 7

# Keynote Presenters

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## Monday, March 9



### **Bonnie Taylor**

Chief Communications & Strategy Officer, Partner, Talent Resources

*Leading Out Loud: Claiming Your Voice, Visibility, and Influence*



### **Dr. Janice K. Jackson**

Executive Director, Aspen Institute, Former Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools

*Lead with CPS: Creating a Clear Continuum for Leadership Advancement*

## Tuesday, March 10



### **Rosa Diaz**

Superintendent, Carteret Public Schools

*Lead with Purpose. Build Your Legacy*



### **Carmen Agra Deedy**

Award-winning author of sixteen books for young readers and an Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA) 2026, nominee for writing and storytelling

*That One Child*

# Agenda

## Monday, March 9

9:00 am -  
9:15 am  
Ballroom

### Welcome

9:15 am -  
10:15 am  
Ballroom

### Keynote – Leading Out Loud: Claiming Your Voice, Visibility, and Influence

Leading Out Loud: Claiming Your Voice, Visibility, and Influence is for women ready to fully step into their leadership presence. In today's world, leadership doesn't just happen in the room; it happens online, in your reputation, and in how you show up every day. This session is about owning your voice, commanding the space you've earned, and building influence with confidence and intention. You'll walk away with practical tools to elevate your presence, strengthen your credibility, and lead boldly in every environment.

**Presenter: Bonnie Taylor**

10:30-11:30

### Session 1

*Creating an AI Welcoming Environment*  
Atlantic 3

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping education, but successful integration requires a welcoming environment where teachers, students, and families feel supported and empowered. This session explores best practices for fostering cultures that embrace AI as a tool for teaching and learning. Drawing on real-world district experiences with guidelines, teacher innovation, and family engagement, participants will learn practical strategies to build buy-in, reduce barriers, and model responsible use. Attendees leave with replicable ideas to create AI-positive schools.

**Presenter: Arielle Denrich, Director of Technology & Innovation, Somerville Public Schools**

***Please Don't Feed the Ducks: How Personalities Drive or Derail Organizational Success***  
Atlantic 4

Organizations thrive—or falter—based on the people within them. This interactive workshop explores how individual personality traits, behaviors, and communication styles shape organizational culture, decision-making, and overall performance, particularly those who block success, or “DUCKS” (Dependent Upon Consistently Killing Success).

Participants will gain practical tools to recognize how personality differences influence motivation, conflict, and teamwork. Through engaging discussions and exercises, they will learn strategies to harness diverse strengths, reduce friction, and prevent common derailers that quietly erode success.

**Presenter: Dr. Lisa J. Gleason, Superintendent, Lavallette School District**

***From Scratch or from the Jar? Leading with Vision in an Age of AI***  
Atlantic 5

In a world that prizes efficiency, women leaders are uniquely positioned to model discernment—knowing when to slow down, when to speed up, and how to keep humanity at the center of innovation. This interactive session reimagines AI as a partner in learning, not a shortcut for thinking. Participants will explore how to balance vision and practicality: when to make the sauce from scratch and when to reach for the jar—without losing the flavor of authentic leadership and learning.

**Presenters: Amy Mount, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Gateway Regional; Shannon Whalen, Superintendent Gateway Regional**

***The Belonging Blueprint: How Vision and Voice Transform School Climate***  
Monmouth 3

Because belonging isn't a buzzword—it's a blueprint. This interactive session invites leaders to reimagine how vision, voice, and value drive meaningful change in schools. Using the CASEL systemic SEL framework, participants will explore practical strategies to co-create shared values, amplify stakeholder voice, and align daily practices with an inclusive school vision.

Through hands-on collaboration and reflection, attendees will leave with actionable tools and renewed inspiration to build communities where every voice matters, every person feels valued, and belonging becomes the foundation for success.

**Presenters: Jennifer Blevins, Principal, Edison Township Public Schools; Renu Mendiratta, Assistant Principal, Edison Township Public Schools**

***Building a Culture of Care: Supporting Staff Wellness to Strengthen School Communities***  
Monmouth 4

This interactive session equips school leaders with practical strategies to build a Culture of Care that strengthens staff wellness and school community health. Participants will examine how daily practices, shared leadership, and intentional wellness structures can reduce burnout and foster psychological safety. Through reflection, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving, attendees will analyze their current systems, identify barriers, and co-design actionable improvements. Leaders will leave with a clear next step, examples from real school settings, and a one-page toolkit to immediately begin nurturing more connected, resilient, and sustainable school environments.

**Presenters: Danyelle Edwards, Elementary Principal, Cherry Hill Public Schools; Mariah Carroll, Preschool Teacher, Cherry Hill Public Schools**

***Rediscovering  
the Girl Inside  
Reclaiming  
Joy, Identity,  
and Purpose  
in Leadership***  
Monmouth 5

As women in education leadership, we carry extraordinary responsibility: uplifting students, developing staff, ensuring academic success, building school culture, navigating change, and meeting community expectations—all while balancing personal lives and emotional demands.

This session is a powerful, uplifting experience designed to help leaders reconnect with the confident, passionate, purposeful girl inside of them—the one who believed she could make a difference long before job titles, evaluations, and district politics added layers of pressure. Through storytelling, reflection, and interactive exercises, participants will rediscover tools for joy, balance, and authentic leadership.

**Presenter: Dr. Pamela Moore, Consultant, NJPSA/FEA**

***Apoyando  
el Futuro/  
Supporting  
the Future:  
Latinas  
Leading with  
Culture,  
Courage, and  
Community***  
Seabright North

This interactive session celebrates the power, voice, and vision of women in leadership, especially Latinas whose journeys reflect the intersection of culture, courage, and community. Grounded in Bordas' (2013) principles of Latino leadership, participants will explore personalismo (authentic relationship-building), servicio (leading through service), and adelante (moving forward with hope and courage). Through storytelling, reflection, and dialogue, attendees will examine how trust, mentorship, and collective uplift strengthen women's networks. The session concludes with a collaborative Leadership Circle where participants create "Apoyando el Futuro/Supporting the Future" commitments to elevate and empower one another.

**Presenters: Nelyda Perez, Superintendent, Matawan Aberdeen Regional School District; Dr. Mitzi Morillo, Superintendent, Mendham Boro Schools; Dr. Sandra Diodonet, Superintendent, Passaic Public Schools; Rosa Diaz, Superintendent, Carteret Public Schools**

***Leadership  
That Thrives***  
Seabright South

Public education thrives when leaders bring their full, authentic selves to their work. Visibility and diversity among administrators enrich school culture and offer students powerful models of belonging, confidence, and connection. This presentation highlights the uplifting lived experiences of four school leaders who lead with openness and integrity. Their stories show how authenticity strengthens relationships, inspires trust, and creates environments where students, staff, and families feel valued. By celebrating these leaders and the positive impact of visible, diverse leadership, the session also provides district leaders with actionable recommendations to foster inclusive school communities where every individual can thrive.

**Presenters: Dr. Lori Burns, Director of Early Childhood Education, Robbinsville Public Schools; Heather Pino-Beattie, Principal, Montgomery Township School District; Thiana Vasquez, Vice Principal, Cliffside Park; Louis Manziano, Supervisor of ELA and Social Studies, Metuchen School District**

11:30 am -  
11:45 am

**Break**

11:45 am -  
12:45 pm

## Session 2

### *Driving Student Success: Lessons from High-Impact Principals* Atlantic 3

Join a dynamic panel on Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, highlighting the transformative leadership of three principals who have driven high growth in student achievement and attendance. This session will showcase how intentional school-based systems, strategic instructional practices, and robust assessment frameworks can lead to measurable student success. Attendees will gain insight into practical strategies for fostering instructional excellence, building effective teams, and creating school cultures that prioritize data-driven decision-making. The panel will provide actionable takeaways for educational leaders seeking to replicate these results in their schools.

**Presenters:** Dr. Samantha Lott-Velez, Assistant Superintendent, Newark Public Schools; Ashley Jiles, Principal, Newark Public Schools; Dorrice Rayam-Johnson, Principal, Newark Public Schools; Karla Venezia, Principal, Newark Public Schools

### *Certified and Creative: AI in Education with Canva* Atlantic 4

Discover how to bring creativity and AI together to elevate classroom instruction and education materials. In this interactive session, participants will explore Canva's AI-powered tools to streamline lesson design, generate engaging visuals, and support student creativity across subjects. Educators will learn practical strategies to integrate AI ethically and meaningfully, earning official Canva certification by completing hands-on challenges and reflections. Attendees will leave inspired, equipped with ready-to-use templates, and confident in using Canva as a dynamic platform for teaching, learning, and communication.

**Presenter:** Hanan Attiyah, Innovation and Design/Gifted and Talented Teacher, Green Brook Township Public School District

### *The Myth-Beliefs of Superwomanhood* Atlantic 5

We often believe the Superwoman Myth: that our value is tied to constant perfection and doing it all alone. This internal pressure creates an unsustainable "weight" that leads directly to burnout. To transition from "Doing it All" to "Leading with Impact," we must shift our focus from managing time to managing energy. In this hands-on workshop activity, we will uncover the "myth-beliefs" of Superwomanhood and then use the Energy Management Matrix to audit your daily landscape. By mapping your tasks against your natural energy rhythms, you will identify:

- The Flow Zone: High-impact work that aligns with your peak energy.
- The Drain Zone: Tasks that exhaust you and should be delegated or eliminated.
- The Protective Strategy: Practical boundaries to safeguard your high-energy times.

Stop carrying the weight. Start mapping the strategy. It's time to trade the myth of "perfection" for the reality of "power."

**Presenters:** Michelle Massey, Director of Instructional Tech, ClassLink; Jamie Saponaro, Senior Director of Community and Professional Learning, ClassLink

***Building Resilient Schools Through Visionary, Vocal, and Value-Driven Leadership***  
Monmouth 3

In this energizing and reflective session, New Jersey female administrators will strengthen their leadership through the framework of Vision, Voice, and Value. Participants will learn practical, evidence-based strategies for fostering student and staff resiliency, communicating with authenticity, and leading with clarity amid change. Through collaborative reflection, real-world examples, and a ready-to-use Resilience Loop and 30/60/90-Day Leadership Action Plan, attendees will leave equipped to model calm, purposeful leadership that builds confident, connected, and compassionate school communities. This session aligns with the New Jersey Professional Standards for School Leaders and supports the statewide goal of developing strong, visionary female leaders in education.

**Presenters: Josephine Hunt, Aspiring Administrator/Educational Leader/Teacher Mentor/Instructional Coach/Integrated Preschool Teacher, Closter Public Schools; Charlene Gerbig, 3rd Grade Teacher, Closter Public Schools**

***ReDefying Gravity***  
Monmouth 4

ReDefying Gravity explores the unique challenges and remarkable strengths of women educational administrators leading in an era defined by urgency, complexity, and relentless time pressures. This session provides practical strategies for reclaiming clarity, protecting time, strengthening professional networks, and sustaining personal well-being while managing demanding school environments. Through reflection, discussion, and actionable planning, attendees will examine the “gravity” that pulls at women leaders and learn how to rise above it with intention and resilience. Participants will leave with concrete tools, renewed confidence, and a collective commitment to lead without limits.

**Presenter: Sherry Knight, Interim Asst. Superintendent of C&I, Burlington Township School District**

***Leading With Purpose: Unlocking the Four Keys to Authentic Leadership***  
Monmouth 5

This session is a powerful guide for female leaders seeking to align their vision and voice with their deepest professional value. We will introduce the four essential keys to success: Knowing your worth, Being your authentic self, Surrounding yourself with a network of leaders, and Reinforcing your boundaries and leading. Attendees will engage in practical exercises focused on self-advocacy and strategic networking. You will leave equipped with actionable strategies to maintain personal well-being, establish clear professional boundaries, and confidently lead with integrity and emotional resilience in your school community.

**Presenter: Lori Perlow, Public Information Officer, Haddon Township School District - Communications Consortium**

***NJTSS-ER  
in Action:  
Improving  
Early Reading  
Outcomes in  
Green Brook  
Seabright North***

This session will spotlight Green Brook Township's collaborative and strategic implementation of the New Jersey Tiered System of Supports for Early Reading (NJTSS-ER) and its impact on early literacy outcomes. Participants will learn how Green Brook's shared leadership approach, data-driven decision-making structures, and alignment of instructional resources have strengthened Tier 1 core instruction and improved the effectiveness of Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Attendees will gain insight into practical systems-level actions that build capacity, promote instructional coherence, and ultimately accelerate reading achievement for all K-3 students.

**Presenters: Shana Lewis, NJTSS-ER State Consultative Coach, Rutgers University; Matt Santos, Supervisor of Learning and Teaching, Green Brook Township Public Schools; Dr. Lisa Ferreira, Director of Student Services, Green Brook Township Public Schools; Natalie Franzi Dougherty, Director of the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery, Division of Teaching and Learning, New Jersey Department of Education**

***One Edison,  
Many  
Pathways:  
Personalized  
Learning  
Across K-12  
Program  
Seabright South***

Edison Township Public Schools is strengthening personalized instruction across K-12 learning environments, including general education, self-contained classrooms, instructional services in medical settings, home instruction pending placement, and alternative programming. This session will highlight how Imagine Learning is being used to identify student skill levels, deliver individualized learning pathways, maintain continuity of instruction for students who are temporarily out of placement, expand access to coursework needed for credit completion, and support multi-level instruction within a single classroom. This approach also supports district cost savings while improving instructional consistency and access across settings. Participants will see practical examples of how Edison teams are using the platform's data and tools to support student engagement, progress monitoring, and responsive instruction across K-12 programs.

**Presenters: Kate Gousman, Supervisor of Special Services, Edison Township Schools; Dan Savarese, Senior Account Executive, Imagine Learning**

12:45 pm -  
2:00 pm

## Lunch and Keynote - Lead with CPS: Creating a Clear Continuum for Leadership Advancement

What if leadership growth in your district wasn't about who you know, but about a clear, intentional pathway anyone could see and access?

In this dynamic keynote, Dr. Janice K. Jackson pulls back the curtain on how Chicago Public Schools designed Lead with CPS; a comprehensive leadership continuum that maps advancement opportunities for employees at every level, from the classroom to the C-suite. Dr. Jackson will share how CPS built transparent systems to identify, develop, and support talent over time, creating real pathways for aspiring and current leaders to grow with purpose.

This session will challenge long-held myths about leadership advancement and help district leaders rethink the structures already within their systems. You'll leave with concrete ideas for clarifying leadership progression, strengthening internal pipelines, and ensuring leaders are supported—every step of the way.

**Presenter: Dr. Janice K. Jackson**

2:00 pm -  
3:00 pm

## Session 3

***Empowering Generation Alpha: Boosting Student Agency & Executive Function***  
Atlantic 3

Generation Alpha doesn't just consume information—they curate it. As digital natives, these students need more than traditional instruction. Mt. Laurel MS is transforming learning to meet this challenge. Join us as we share our journey in redesigning instruction to build student agency through problem-based learning and differentiated paths. Explore how we build executive function through intentional classroom facilitation and reimagine what student engagement can look like.

**Presenters: Mridula Bajaj, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Mount Laurel Schools; Nicole Mound, Curriculum Supervisor, Mount Laurel Schools; Jared Caltabiano, Curriculum Supervisor, Mount Laurel Schools**

***From Fear to Fluency: Leading the AI Conversation in Your District***  
Atlantic 4

School leaders are under pressure to set smart, ethical, and future-ready policies around AI, but where do you even start? Join me for a transparent conversation on building districtwide AI capacity. Learn practical ways to model responsible AI use, lead professional development with confidence, and design a culture that balances innovation with integrity. Discover how intentional and purposeful AI literacy instruction empowers educators and students to think critically, act ethically, and harness AI as a tool for learning. You'll leave with frameworks, talking points, and PD ideas that move everyone from fear to fluency.

**Presenter: Kathi Kersznowski, Education Technology Specialist, Washington Township Schools**

***You Can't Compete with Me. I Want You to Win Too.***  
**Atlantic 5**

This session explores the scarcity mindset that can cause female leaders to inadvertently participate in destructive competition with other women. We will challenge the narrative that the only option for female leadership success is to outshine everyone at the table. The focus shifts to peer advocacy and mutual sponsorship as the true power strategies for women in education. This workshop provides practical frameworks for establishing strong, supportive professional networks that guarantee collective success and break the cycle of isolation that can hold women back.

**Presenter: Dr. Tamar Spitzer, Supervisor of World Languages and ESL, Montville Township Public Schools**

***Women in Leadership: Paving Paths Through Connection and Engagement***  
**Monmouth 3**

This interactive workshop celebrates and empowers women leaders by exploring how connection, empathy, and collaboration serve as powerful tools for leadership and meaningful family and community engagement. Participants will reflect on their own leadership voice, learn strategies to strengthen authentic relationships, and identify through the concept of “one voice at a time” strategies to improve their leadership practice.

Participants will:

1. Reflect on their leadership identity and voice - exploring how relational and inclusive leadership fosters trust and belonging.
2. Connect leadership strengths to family and community engagement - identifying ways empathy, collaboration, and transparency can deepen partnerships.
3. Align leadership practices through the practice of “one voice at a time”- applying practical engagement strategies across the school year to engage students, staff and the wider community

**Presenters: Kristine Berlowitz, Supervisor of Mental Health, UCESC; Tiara Lockett-Walcott, SAC, UCESC**

***Funny Bone, Strong Spine: Laughs & Lessons for Women in Leadership***  
**Monmouth 4**

In this energizing and deeply relatable session, New Jersey school counselor and stand-up comedian Vernita Bostick blends personal storytelling, laugh-out-loud moments, and her G.R.O. framework (Ground Yourself in Reality, Reframe the Narrative, One Step at a Time) to illustrate that resilience is built, not born. Women leaders will uncover practical ways to navigate stress, manage work-life balance, and shoulder the demands of leading while caring for everyone else. Expect humor, perspective, and strategies that strengthen leadership from the inside out.

**Presenter: Vernita Bostick, School Counselor, Paterson Public Schools**

***Finding Your Leadership Voice: Communicate With Confidence & Influence***  
Monmouth 5

Finding your leadership voice means communicating with confidence, authenticity, and genuine influence. By embracing collaborative leadership principles and building strong female partnerships, you unlock not only your own potential but also create a powerful ripple effect of empowerment and success for others. Together, women leaders can break down persistent barriers, foster innovation, and transform workplaces into inclusive, high-performing environments where everyone thrives. Your voice matters deeply—use it boldly, connect authentically, and lead with lasting impact.

**Presenters: Cara DiMeo, Assistant Superintendent, Toms River Regional School District; Alyce Anderson, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Brick Township Public Schools**

***Connecting Colors: Benefits for Mind & Body***  
Seabright North

Did you know that the hues on your plate and in your wardrobe matter? Prepare to break out of your comfort zone as we explore daily color choices and turn them into powerful tools for mind-body wellness. Audience participation is encouraged in this session!

**Presenters: Patty Fragioudakis, Director of Operations, Maschio's; Katie Filosa, Director of Field Supervision, Maschio's**

***The Leader's Compass: Finding YOUR True North***  
Seabright South

Join us to explore this nationally developed, immersive eight-part series designed exclusively to maximize YOUR leadership potential. You will sample activities designed to clarify your core mission, master cutting-edge best practices with a supportive cohort, and sharpen your road-block-smashing problem-solving skills.

Stop just reacting—start leading with power and passion! Re-energize yourself and your entire administrative team for a profound, lasting impact. Don't just lead; inspire.

**Presenters: Heather Moran, Coordinator of Professional Learning, NJPSA/FEA; Karen Bingert, Executive Director, NJPSA**

3:00 pm -  
3:15 pm

**Break**

3:15 pm -  
4:15 pm

## Session 4

### *Safeguarding Your Career in Challenging Times*

Atlantic 3

This essential workshop, tailored for female school and district leaders, addresses the critical skills needed to safeguard and sustain careers during periods of uncertainty or challenge. Attendees will learn to proactively identify potential professional risks, understand the subtle and overt signs of organizational or career trouble, and develop actionable strategies to mitigate these threats. A core focus will be on the vital art of protecting and managing one's professional reputation—a non-negotiable asset. Participants will leave with a clear framework for strategic self-advocacy, boundary setting, and reputation management to ensure their leadership influence and professional longevity remain intact, even when the environment is difficult.

**Presenters:** Dr. Barbara Sargent, Superintendent, Hermon School Department, Maine; Dr. Nancy Gartenberg, Executive County Superintendent, NJDOE, Morris County

### *A Fresh Spin on Special Education: Reclaiming Passion, Purpose, and Power in Inclusive Education*

Atlantic 4

Too often, special education is viewed through a lens of compliance rather than as a space for creativity, collaboration, and innovation. This session challenges that perception, inviting educators and leaders to re-ignite their passion for inclusion by exploring what makes special education truly dynamic: responsive instruction, student voice, co-teaching partnerships, and universally designed classrooms that benefit all learners. Participants will examine misconceptions that isolate special education and rediscover its potential as the driving force of instructional excellence. Using real-world examples and research-based strategies, this session reframes special education as the most innovative and future-focused part of education.

**Presenters:** Annie Corley-Hand, Director, Leading Innovative Learning Associates; Michele Gardner, Chief Executive Officer, All In for Inclusive Education

### *Building Brains and Relationships Beginning at Birth: Explor- ing Multilin- gual Parents' Experiences with Penn- sauken Babies Initiative's Family School Partnership*

Atlantic 5

Session will explore a family/school partnership - Pennsauken Babies Initiative (PBI) - and a research study of this active family engagement program. PBI is a family/school program where infants/toddlers, school age children, and parents gather 6-7 times per school year to practice strategies to maximize learning for children during the most critical period of brain development - from birth through age 4. PBI focuses on critical skills children need for language, literacy, and educational success. The structure of the PBI program provides ongoing, on-site learning that embraces the entire family and empowers parents as their child's first and most formative teacher.

**Presenters:** Dr. Diane Joyce, Principal, Pennsauken Public Schools; Dr. Tara Barnstead, Reading Specialist, Pennsauken Public Schools

***From Anxiety to Agency: Women Leading in the Age of AI***  
Monmouth 3

As women leaders, we often carry the dual weight of leading change and staying relevant in a world transformed by AI. This session shifts that pressure into possibility — and that anxiety into agency. Together, we'll explore how to navigate uncertainty with confidence, amplify the strengths that make women's leadership uniquely human, and design professional cultures grounded in curiosity, compassion, and purpose.

**Presenter: Rosemary Seitel, Consultant, NJPSA/FEA**

***Amplifying Voices: Elevating Equity and Family Partnerships Through EDIT Leadership***  
Monmouth 4

This session explores how elementary school leaders can amplify student, family, and community voices while fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive school environment. Participants will learn how intentional practices—such as integrating diverse cultures into daily routines, using project-based learning to broaden cultural awareness, and hosting community-centered events like Multicultural Night—can strengthen equity and deepen family partnerships. Through practical strategies and real examples from elementary implementation, attendees will gain actionable ideas for creating environments where every culture is valued and every voice is heard.

**Presenter: Lauren Riedinger, Vice Principal, Burlington Township School District**

***The Hardening and Softening of Schools (PreK-12)***  
Monmouth 5

Attendees will explore how schools can effectively balance hardening measures—such as controlled access, surveillance, and physical security enhancements—with softening strategies that support students through a strong multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS/PBSIS). This session outlines how safety is strengthened when physical protections are paired with proactive behavioral supports, trauma-informed practices, and positive school climate initiatives. Participants will learn practical approaches to integrating both models, reducing threats while promoting connection, early intervention, and overall student well-being. They can expect clear examples, implementation steps, and strategies tailored for PreK–12 environments.

**Presenters: Meaghan Zinola, Director of District Safety & Security, Clifton Public Schools; Paula Raigoza, PBSIS District Coordinator, Clifton Public Schools**

***The Sparks Session: Turning Pages, Turning Power Through Bold, Authentic Leadership***  
Seabright North

Arrive and Thrive: 7 Practical Practices for Women Navigating Leadership  
You've arrived—not just to lead, but to shape culture, inspire change, and drive impact. Thriving takes more than grit. This energizing session invites women leaders to reflect on purpose, explore strategies for sustainable growth, and ignite their leadership spark. You'll leave with a ready-to-launch Women's Leadership Book Club framework to foster connection and accountability, plus tools to extend your impact beyond the conference—including how to fundraise your team's mission. Move from showing up to showing what's possible: boldly, authentically, and with renewed vision.

**Presenters: Dr. Kathleen Taylor, Superintendent (Retired), Atlantic Cape Women Leadership Initiative; Susan Spiers, Superintendent (Retired), Atlantic Cape Women Leadership Initiative**

4:15 pm -  
5:30 pm

## Networking/Reception (Sponsored by Edmentum)

# Tuesday, March 10

9:00 am -  
9:15 am  
Ballroom

## Welcome

9:15 am -  
10:15 am  
Ballroom

## Keynote - Lead with Purpose. Build Your Legacy

Leadership is not defined by title. It is shaped by vision, strengthened by voice, and sustained by values. Drawing from her personal story and leadership across education and nonprofit governance, Rosa Diaz explores what it means to lead with intention, especially when the path is not linear. From humble beginnings rooted in resilience to serving as a Superintendent and national leader, Rosa's journey reflects clarity, courage, and the power of community.

This keynote challenges leaders to move beyond short term wins and consider the legacy they are shaping through their decisions, relationships, and influence. Attendees are invited to reflect on how they use their voice, empower others, and lead work aligned with their values, recognizing that true leadership is measured not only by what we achieve, but by what endures. Grounded in the belief that success without purpose is hollow, this keynote invites leaders to lead with intention, courage and a commitment to impact that lasts.

**Presenter: Rosa Diaz**

10:30 am -  
11:30 am

## Session 5

***Reducing Violence and Suicide in Schools through Coordinated State and Local Leadership***  
Atlantic 3

Participants will engage with a panel of local and national leaders focused on preventing student harm to self or others through proactive identification, intervention, and coordinated support. Panelists will share hard-earned lessons from critical incidents and system gaps, and how those insights have shaped whole-child, case-management approaches to behavioral threat assessment and suicide risk assessment across school communities.

**Presenters:** Jillian Haring, Senior Advisor - Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management, Public Consulting Group (PCG); Dana Kozak, Supervisor, Hamilton Township School District

***Grading and Instructional Practices and the Impact on Post-Secondary Opportunities: Who Is Making the Grade***  
Atlantic 4

This workshop aims to foster a dialogue on the ethical quandary surrounding grading systems. It explores whether grading and instructional practices exacerbate the existing caste-like structures within secondary education. By examining the link between grades and post-secondary opportunities in marginalized communities, the discussion seeks to deepen the insights of educational leaders.

The conversation will also delve into the concept of ensuring consistent grading practices, emphasizing the crucial role of educational leaders in developing and maintaining fair and equitable practices. The statement “who my teacher is should not determine my grade” continues to raise concerns in education.

**Presenter:** Dr. Anita Champagne, Superintendent, Morris County Vocational School District

***Empowering Educational Leaders: Neuroeducation and the New Community of Care***  
Atlantic 5

This session examines a collaborative school improvement model focused on holistic teacher support. We will demonstrate how the integration of structured Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) leverages neuroeducation principles to enhance instructional practice while simultaneously reducing educator stress and burnout. By offering dedicated, paid release time for collaboration and self-care, schools can foster a shared purpose and strengthen instructional capacity, thereby boosting teacher self-efficacy and improving the overall school climate. Ultimately, investing in teacher support is the most effective way to ensure robust support for all students and staff.

**Presenters:** Christine Pollinger, Assistant Principal, Pascack Valley Regional High School District; Aarti Mallya, Biology Teacher, Pascack Valley Regional High School District

***Every Era Tells a Story***  
**Monmouth 3**

Step into your leadership era with “Every Era Tells a Story” — a fearless, bejeweled journey through the eras of growth, grit, and grace that define women in leadership, particularly education. From Debut dreams to Reputation resilience and Lover-level heart, this session blends data and storytelling to prove that every leader has an album’s worth of lessons. Expect mirrorball moments, invisible strings of connection, and maybe even a few “It’s me, hi, I’m the leader, it’s me” realizations. Long live the women rewriting their stories—one era at a time.

**Presenter: Patricia Fitzgerald, Special Projects Coordinator/Business Dept. Liaison, Woodbridge Township BOE**

***Brave and Authentic Leadership as the Antidote to Imposter Syndrome!***  
**Monmouth 4**

We all know what imposter syndrome feels like, and most of us have struggled with it somewhere along our journey. This session invites you to challenge your inner critic and reflect on the experiences, skills, and hard work that brought you here. We’ll explore practical strategies to turn self-doubt into self-efficacy, leverage your unique strengths, embrace vulnerability, and lead with authenticity. You’ll leave ready to take ownership of your story and move forward with greater confidence and purpose.

**Presenters: Priscilla Aniegbuna, Assistant Principal, Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District; Laura Bassett, Principal, Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District; LeighAnn Matthews, Supervisor of Multilingual Education, K-12, Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District**

***Unapologetically Successful: Breakdowns → Breakthroughs. Permission to Shine***  
**Monmouth 5**

This session empowers women leaders to boldly embrace their achievements, reframe setbacks as powerful catalysts for growth, and set the boundaries necessary for sustainable success. Through real stories, reflective prompts, and research-aligned strategies, participants will explore how to rise from challenges with clarity and confidence. Attendees will leave with practical tools to protect their leadership energy, celebrate their wins without apology, and transform breakdowns into breakthrough moments that elevate both personal and professional impact.

**Presenter: Dr. Brianna Rucci, District Supervisor Math & Science, Delsea Regional Public Schools**

***Research Practice Partnerships to Improve Systems for MLs in Early Childhood Education and Beyond***  
**Seabright North**

Through research-practice partnerships (RPPs), we have engaged in collaborative work to strengthen systems that support Multilingual Learners in preschool and beyond. As part of this partnership, each district has launched a range of activities and initiatives designed to improve current practices and respond to identified areas for growth. This includes expanding supports for dual language learners (DLLs) and ensuring that leadership structures reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Latine children and families.

**Presenters: Dr. Alexandra Figueras-Daniel, Assistant Research Professor, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers the State University of New Jersey; Dr. Andrea Fontenez, Director of Bilingual & ESL, New Brunswick Public Schools; Adriana Birne, Director of Early Childhood Education, Union City Public Schools; Gissel Cristobal, Director of Early Childhood Education, Passaic Public Schools**

***The Dual  
Journey: How  
Motherhood  
Builds Bold,  
Authentic  
Leaders***  
Seabright South

How can the challenges working women face be reframed to highlight the powerful parallels between motherhood and leadership? This collaborative and reflective session explores the intersection of personal growth and professional strength, inspired by the work of Brené Brown and other prominent female leaders. Together, we'll examine how authenticity, vulnerability, and resilience shape effective leadership. Through group discussion and real-life scenarios, we'll consider how the daily work of motherhood builds the very traits great leaders need: empathy, clarity, and emotional intelligence. This session invites women at any stage of motherhood to feel supported, empowered, and grounded in their leadership.

**Presenters: Gabriella Hall, Director of Special Services, MOESC; Annemarie Hanley, Supervisor of Special Services, MOESC; Karina McIntyre, Director of Human Resources, MOESC; Brigid Mullins, MOESC Supervisor of Special Services**

**11:30 am -  
1:00 pm**

**Lunch/Keynote - That One Child**

There is nearly always that one child in an educator's career that is unforgettable. Rarely do we know the end of the story, yet those children leave an imprint as permanent as a handprint on dried clay. Maddening, inspiring, or heartbreaking (terms not exclusive of one another), the memory of that "one child" is often the most piercing reminder of the reason we entered education. With humor, Carmen Deedy is the first to affirm that as an elementary student, she was no prize. Join Ms. Deedy as she shares an encounter with the principal who shaped the trajectory of her school life.

**Presenter: Carmen Agra Deedy**

1:00 pm -  
2:00 pm

## Session 6

*Difficult Conversations, Soft Skills: Communication Strategies for Women Leaders*  
Atlantic 3

Change in education is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be destructive. Whether implementing new programs, reorganizing systems, or managing politically charged initiatives, women leaders are often expected to balance decisiveness with diplomacy. They are often praised for their empathy but penalized when they assert authority. Many women leaders struggle to lead politically charged change while staying authentic and relational. "Change management" can be overused jargon. People resist and politics are messy. For women, staying kind matters as much as staying strong. This session invites participants to explore how to lead with both heart and strength, combining relational intelligence with decisive leadership.

- Preparing emotionally and strategically before tough talks
- Strategies for building consensus when stakeholders disagree
- Frame change so people feel heard and not steamrolled - conversation frameworks for emotionally charged situations
- Communicate the truth without losing trust - keep composure and redirect without defensiveness
- Boundary setting and guilt management

**Presenter: Dr. Lisa Ferreira, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and Programs, Green Brook Township Public Schools**

*Inside-Out Leadership: Strengthening Systems Through Empowered Voices*  
Atlantic 4

This session explores how schools and organizations can cultivate sustainable growth by strengthening leadership from within. Too often, strong leaders are underutilized or perceived as a challenge rather than an asset. Inside-Out Leadership reframes this mindset by identifying individual strengths and harnessing them to elevate the entire system. Participants will learn strategies to empower diverse voices, build leadership capacity across all levels, and foster a culture where leadership is distributed, not centralized. By embracing internal talent, systems can become more resilient, collaborative, and future-ready.

**Presenters: Meagan Drapkin, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dunellen Public Schools; Evelyn Swift, Elementary Principal, Manchester Public Schools**

*The Faces Behind the Data: Data Analysis That Humanizes Statistics and Effects Change*  
Atlantic 5

Schools and districts live or die by data—graduation rates, test scores, suspensions, attendance. But numbers alone can overwhelm and dehumanize. Behind every datapoint is a face, a family, a story. So how do we analyze data in ways that honor students and lead to real change? In this session, we'll explore practical strategies that bring humanity back to data: structured collaboration, accessible analysis tools, and models from the district, school, team, and classroom level. Participants will leave with ready-to-use resources that move data from charts to action—helping educators hear student voices, see students clearly, and drive meaningful improvement.

**Presenter: Emily Creveling, Supervisor of Language Arts 6-12, West-Windsor Plainsboro School District**

***Waves of Wellness: Small Actions. Big impact.***  
**Monmouth 3**

This workshop empowers school administrators to champion staff wellness through a district-wide Wellness Collective. Discover how to cultivate teacher leaders as Wellness Ambassadors and implement school-wide programs that promote staff well-being and a sense of belonging district-wide. Participants will explore resources and brainstorm ways to address the growing challenges of stress, burnout, and sustaining well-being in the workplace through interactive activities and practical tools. By the end of the session, participants will leave with tools to lead initiatives that support staff well-being, self-care, and a positive school culture, creating waves of wellness throughout the school community.

**Presenters: Dr. Hitisha Patel, Coordinator of Access & Engagement, Edison Township Public Schools; Harriet Sideris, Staff Development Coordinator, Edison Township Public Schools**

***LEAD LIKE A WOMAN! How Transformational Leaders Are Nurturing in the Teacher Shortage***  
**Monmouth 4**

The Hamilton Township School District is combatting teacher shortages using the nurturing and empowering strengths of transformational women's leadership. This session details how leadership conducted stay interviews to boost retention and engaged the community to clarify teaching pathways. Learn how leveraging empathy and belief built a sustainable talent pipeline through internal growth and strategic partnerships.

**Presenter: Catherine Arminio, Assistant Director of Human Resources, Hamilton Township School District**

***Sharing the Journey: Navigating Leadership, Identity, and Impact as Women in Education***  
**Monmouth 5**

Leadership in education is rarely a straight line. In this interactive session, participants will reflect on their leadership journeys examining pivotal moments, barriers overcome, and the mentors and networks that shaped their paths. Through guided reflection and peer dialogue, women leaders will strengthen clarity around their next steps, reconnect with their leadership voice, and intentionally build circles of support that sustain both personal and professional growth.

**Presenters: Dr. Kimberley Markus, Former NJ Commissioner of Education; Annette Rodriguez, Proximity VP**

***Girl Code: Leading with Trust, Lifting with Support***  
**Seabright North**

This session explores the transformative power of women's leadership through the lens of Girl Code, a philosophy grounded in trust, authenticity, and collective empowerment. Drawing on Brené Brown's work on vulnerability, courage, and trust, the session highlights how women leaders can cultivate "brave spaces" that foster connection and belonging. Participants will learn practical strategies to build trust-centered networks, model authenticity, and support one another in meaningful, intentional ways. Attendees will leave with actionable tools to lead with clarity, courage, and compassion.

**Presenters: Nelyda Perez, Superintendent, Matawan Aberdeen Regional School District; Dr. Robyn Klim, Superintendent, Lawrenceville Township Public Schools; Dr. Rosetta Treece, Superintendent, Hopewell Valley School District; Kelly Weldon-Contardo, Superintendent, Ocean Township Public Schools**

***Building Your Vision: A Community of Female Educators on the Doctoral Path***  
Description  
Seabright South

Join a community of visionary female educators exploring the doctoral journey together. This interactive workshop creates space for women to share experiences, address unique challenges, and develop strategies for balancing the demands of work, life, and doctoral studies. Learn about funding opportunities that support women in higher education, navigate program selection with confidence, and discover mentorship pathways designed to amplify female voices in educational leadership. Whether you're considering a doctorate or already enrolled, connect with a supportive network and gain practical tools to lead with vision, speak with authority, and demonstrate your value as an educational leader making lasting change.

**Presenters: Dr. Sandra M. Diodonet, Superintendent, Passaic Public Schools; Dr. Alicia Subervi, Principal, Green Brook Township**

2:00 pm -  
2:15 pm

## **Break**

2:15 pm -  
3:15 pm

## **Session 7**

***Teaching That SHINEs: Building Teacher Efficacy Through AI to Strengthen the Core***  
Atlantic 3

Imagine teachers who feel empowered to use artificial intelligence not as a replacement for expertise, but as a catalyst for it. This session explores how AI can strengthen the instructional core and build teacher efficacy through the SHINE framework—Standards-Aligned, High Expectations, Intentional Planning, Needs-Based Differentiation, and Engagement. Participants will examine practical ways to use AI for lesson design, reflection, and collaboration while maintaining authenticity and purpose. Attendees will leave with strategies to lead educators in integrating AI thoughtfully to enhance instruction, equity, and confidence in every classroom.

**Presenter: Fatihah Abdur-Rahman, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, Salem City School District**

***Leading with Intention: Building Systems that Empower Innovative Practice***  
Atlantic 4

This session highlights how school leaders can drive innovation through intentional, data-informed, and human-centered leadership. Participants will explore practical ways to use AI for collaboration, data-driven problem-solving, and reflective decision-making—such as analyzing performance trends and setting evidence-based goals—while maintaining empathy and professional judgment. The session will share examples of building sustainable systems for innovation, from forming multi-stakeholder AI committees to using AI for personalized and professional learning design. It will also address how leaders can align priorities, develop shared practices, and streamline processes that strengthen relationships, instruction, and collaboration across a school community.

**Presenter: Heather Esposito, Assistant Principal, Cherry Hill Public School District**

***Service Learning Pathway: Atlantic 5***

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated: "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve." The creation of a Service Learning Pathway provides an opportunity for all students, regardless of demographics, experience, or ability, to make positive connections within the school and the community and be celebrated for their contributions. By developing a Service Learning Pathway in your own school or district, you can help every student be great.

**Presenter: Patricia Riley, Principal, Hopewell Valley Central High School**

***Analyzing, Disrupting, Rebuilding: Creating Equitable Systems for Diverse Leaders***  
Monmouth 3

The workshop will explore meaningful support mechanisms for Women of Color pursuing and thriving in building level and central office leadership roles, while building equitable organizational systems that enhance outcomes for all learners. During this interactive session we will: analyze recent research on the positive impact of diverse leadership on student learning and school climate, identify systemic barriers and enabling conditions for Women of Color in the leadership pipeline, evaluate current district practices and policies through an equity lens to ensure support for diverse leaders and share researched-based, actionable steps in building or enhancing organizational practices for all aspiring leaders.

**Presenters: Dr. Danita Ishibashi, Retired Assistant Superintendent, Educational Leadership Program Coordinator at The College of New Jersey; Dr. Denise Lowe, Retired Superintendent, Howell Township School Board Member; Dr. Kayla Lott, Director of Human Resources, Linden Public Schools**

***BTAM, MTSS, and Domestic Violence Support***  
Monmouth 4

All Districts are required to have Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams to address persons of concern. This session will briefly overview BTAM practices and more importantly, cover the management of cases. Using the MTSS framework we discuss how supports can be structured to help students of concern and prevent students becoming of concern. BTAM does not stop with students. Threats and management is also required for staff who may be victims of domestic violence. Learning how to use the structures we have for BTAM with our multi-disciplinary team and using MTSS we explore how to make BTAM not just something we need to do, but something that truly helps schools become safer places for students and staff.

**Presenters: Dr. Mary Ann Bell, Superintendent, Burlington Township Schools; Dr. Kaisha Masters, Assistant Principal, Pleasantville Schools; Liz Scott, Human Resources Director, Burlington Township Schools**

***Bridging Home and School: Transformative Parent Engagement Strategies***  
Monmouth 5

This workshop highlights how our Parent Clinicals and Parent Academy model strengthens meaningful family and community engagement within special education programs. Participants will explore how structured clinical sessions, hands-on learning, and coaching opportunities empower caregivers to better understand their child's needs and actively support skill development at home. Through real examples and collaborative strategies, we will demonstrate how consistent parent partnership enhances communication, reinforces instructional practices, and builds confidence for families of students with diverse needs. Attendees will leave with replicable tools for developing sustainable, family-centered engagement systems in their own schools and districts.

**Presenter: Lorraine Rake, Early Childhood Director/Principal, South Bergen Jointure Commission**

***Restorative Leadership: Nourishing Yourself to Strengthen Your School***  
Seabright North

This session equips women in educational leadership with practical tools to strengthen community care and personal well-being. Participants will learn trauma-informed and healing-centered strategies for fostering supportive school cultures, along with neuroscience-based techniques for emotional regulation. They will experience accessible mindfulness, meditation, and simple movement practices designed to reduce stress and improve balance. Through interactive reflection and hands-on activities, attendees will leave with a personalized toolkit to enhance communication, model wellness, and create sustainable work-life habits. Leaders will walk away grounded, refreshed, and prepared to cultivate care and connection within their teams and school communities.

**Presenters: Tara Martinetti, Supervisor of Special Services, South Plainfield School District; Suzanne Pfarr Morley, MS-CCC-SLP, Berkeley Heights Public Schools**

***Do Your Students Know What's Real? A Collaborative Approach to Teaching Information Literacy***  
Seabright South

Technology is changing how students learn and behave. Teachers need new strategies and ideas to help students who are comfortable with technology but have difficulty focusing and following through on assignments. Students need to be prepared for a future where they have the skills needed to offset a world where they are questioning reality. Students also need to learn how to navigate the constantly changing landscape of information available to them. In 2023, New Jersey became the first state to mandate information literacy into all schools. This session will look at how all content areas can include information and media literacy into instruction and curriculum.

**Presenters: Jessica Lederman, Teacher of English, Union County Educational Services Commission; Stacy Casais, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Union County Educational Services Commission**

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