

Women's Leadership Conference

Writing Your Story

Chapter II



March 28, 2026

8:30 am - 2:30 pm

Newark Vocational High School
301 West Kinney street
Newark, NJ 07103

Scan the QR Code for more
conference information



Newark
Board of Education
Roger León, Superintendent

Where Passion Meets Progress

"The most common way
people give up their power
is by thinking they
don't have any."

- Alice Walker



Message from Superintendent León

To our Women Leaders:

It is with great excitement that we celebrate our 5th Annual Women's Leadership Conference!

As we continue to boldly implement our historic ten-year strategic plan, *The Next Decade: 2020-30*, the importance of our women leaders throughout the organization remains at the forefront. The significant contributions of women have been recognized annually in March since 1987, with a Presidential proclamation designating the month as Women's History Month. In the Newark Public Schools, we are proud to join in this celebration and committed to providing a space to recognize and highlight the profound impact women leaders make in Newark every single day.

The theme for this year's Women's Leadership Conference is **"Writing Your Story: Chapter II."** This theme is a continuation from last year's conference, and it is a powerful reminder that each one of us has the opportunity and the responsibility to craft our own narrative, embrace our leadership potential, and move forward with purpose. I am confident that the sessions you participate in will build upon the many talents and leadership skills you already bring to the table, helping you to better navigate the unique challenges and complexities of both our profession and society.

This year's committee has assembled a dynamic lineup of speakers and presenters, all eager to empower you as you continue to serve Newark children and families with distinction. We are grateful to all who have contributed to making this conference a meaningful experience that fosters growth, collaboration, and inspiration for our current and aspiring women leaders. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Deputy Superintendent Yolonda Severe, all the committee members, and all the presenters and partners who made this event possible. Your dedication ensures that this conference is not only a celebration, but also a platform for empowering women to continue to write and redefine their own stories of success and leadership.

As I have shared on many occasions, my own path has been shaped by the strong women in my life - my mother, my three sisters, teachers, mentors, and colleagues. To them, and to all of you participating in this year's conference, I say, **thank you**. May your leadership continue to inspire and uplift the children of our beloved city of Newark.

Sincerely,



Roger León Superintendent

A Message from Deputy Superintendent Yolonda Severe

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

It is both a privilege and a profound honor to welcome you to the Newark Board of Education's Annual Women's Leadership Conference, "Writing Your Story: Chapter II." This gathering represents more than a conference, it is a continued commitment to cultivating leadership, advancing purpose, and strengthening the pipeline of visionary women who lead with bravery, precision and passion. In alignment with The Next Decade: 2020–2030 Strategic Plan, Priority 4: Continuous Learning for All, the Women's Leadership Conference reflects our ongoing commitment to investing in the development of highly effective leaders as essential to building a strong organization and a more promising future for those we serve.

Building on the energy and inspiration of last year's convening, where participants reflected on their journeys, elevated their voices, and affirmed their identities as leaders, this year we move forward with greater depth and intention. Chapter II is not simply a continuation; it is a transformation.

Last year, we affirmed that every story holds power and meaning. Together, we explored identity, voice, resilience, and professional leadership. This year, we are called to go further to author our next chapter with purpose, to shape our leadership narrative with intention, and to deepen our responsibility to one another. This is an opportunity to examine not only where we have been, but how we are growing, how we are leading, how we are mentoring, and how we are creating pathways for other women to rise alongside us.

Writing Your Story: Chapter II centers on expanding our leadership impact, strengthening authentic networks of support, and fostering fellowship that transcends titles and roles. Through thoughtful dialogue, collaborative learning, and meaningful engagement, we will continue building a community grounded in empowerment, service, and sustained growth.

We invite all partners and stakeholders to join us in this next chapter, one that honors progress, encourages reflection, and calls us toward bold, values driven leadership. Your presence, perspective, and voice are essential to this continuing story.

Yours in fellowship,



Yolonda Severe
Deputy Superintendent

Registration

Breakfast

Opening Reception

Keynote Address

Breakout Session #1

Breakout Session #2

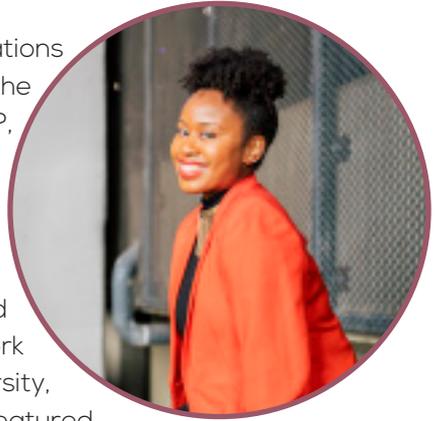
Lunch

The Deputy's Circle: Her Voice, Her Story

Closing Reception

Vendor Fair (Throughout Conference)

Janel Martinez is a writer, communications specialist, and the founder of the award-winning blog, *Ain't I Latina?*, an online destination celebrating Afro-Latinx womanhood. The Bronx, NY native is a frequent public speaker discussing media, culture, and identity at conferences and events for Bloomberg, NBCU, New York University, SXSW, Harvard University, and more. She's appeared as a featured



guest on national shows and outlets, such as MSNBC's *The Culture Is: Latina*, BuzzFeed, ESSENCE, NPR, and Sirius XM, and her work has appeared in Adweek, Univision Communications, Oprah Daily, Refinery29, Remezcla and The New York Times, among others.

The Honduran-American has been nominated for the 20th Annual Rosoff Award in the 20-Something Category and won the Afro-Latino Festival of New York's Digital Empowerment Award and, in 2018, was recognized at City Hall by the New York City Council, the Black, Latino and Asian Caucus and the Bronx Delegation to the NYC Council for her contributions as a woman of Garifuna descent.

She is a graduate of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, where she received a bachelor's degree in magazine journalism and sociology. Martinez penned "Abuela's Greatest Gift" in the YA anthology, *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed*, published by Flatiron Books. Currently, she is working on her next book project.

For the Culture/Pa' La Cultura: Embracing Identity Through Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful tool. Whether you leverage your story to showcase your identity and culture in a personal or professional setting, it has the potential to sharpen a person, brand, or institution's cultural competence. And in today's world, that's invaluable.

In this interactive address and Q&A, writer, journalist, and storyteller Janel Martinez will discuss her work creating a pioneering blog, *Ain't I Latina?*, and how she has used her platform to document Afro-Latinx/e narratives (more specifically Afro-Latinas, like herself), as well as Garifuna identity, in the United States. Using her journey as a springboard, Martinez will provide attendees with strategies for honing their own dynamic story.

She will read a snippet of "Abuela's Greatest Gift" in *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed*.

"Your story is what you have, what you will always have. It is something to own."

- Michelle Obama



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Presented by: Rachael DuBose

Salon 2: Writing Your Story: Leading with Confidence, Clarity, and Purpose in Education

Presented by: Pegine Echevarria

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Presented by: Amanda Ann Gregory

Salon 4: Still Becoming: Evolving to the 2.0 Version of Yourself

Presented by: Dr. Marline Francois-Madden

Salon 5: Empowering Women to Successfully Navigate Financial Freedom

Presented by: Carol Ann Fernandez

Salon 6: What's Your Catalyst?

Presented by: Alana Hill

Salon 7: Setting Up Girls for Success 2.0 - The Next Chapter

Presented by: Bernadette Williams

Salon 8: Rough Drafts Welcome: Rewriting Resilience

Presented by: Vernita Bostick

Salon 9: Purpose Over Pressure: Shifting from the Hustle to Harmony

Presented by: Shavonne Reed

Women leaders often reach a moment when past success no longer reflects who they are becoming. This dynamic session creates space to pause, reflect, and intentionally write the next chapter of your leadership journey. Through guided reflection, storytelling, and practical vision-casting tools, participants will realign personal growth, emotional wellness, and purpose-driven leadership. Grounded in trauma-informed principles and lived experience, this understanding empowers women to release outdated narratives, redefine their leadership identity, and move forward with clarity, authenticity, and legacy in mind.



Rachael E. DuBose

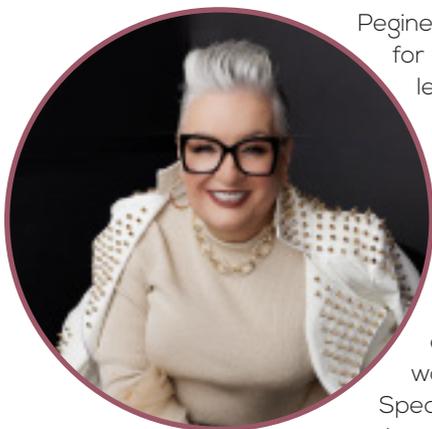
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In this high-energy, interactive workshop, Pegine Echevarria guides women educators through a powerful experience that blends leadership development, storytelling, inspiration, and practical application. Through reflection, engaging dialogue, laughter, and meaningful moments of insight, participants reconnect to their why, strengthen their leadership confidence, and clarify how they want to show up for students, staff, and themselves.

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Today, she is an award-winning entrepreneur, internationally recognized women's leadership expert, and Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) whose work has impacted over one million people through partnerships with Fortune-level organizations, government agencies, military branches, and educational institutions. Known for blending leadership development with storytelling and original motivational music for women leaders, Pegine inspires educators to lead with confidence, clarity, and heart. She reminds educators: your presence matters, your voice counts, and your story is still being written.

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Participants will learn how the nervous system impacts leadership behaviors, communication, emotional regulation, self-worth, and decision-making, and how simple embodied practices can interrupt reactivity and restore agency. Techniques include grounding, breathwork, body scanning, open and supportive postures, mindful movement, somatic narratives, and EMDR bilateral resourcing.

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In this session, attendees will learn to pause, reflect, and reconnect with the leader they are called to be. While many educators may have experienced a version of themselves shaped by burnout, they will learn to evolve into leaders grounded in purpose, confidence, and clarity. This session reframes “2.0” not as doing more, but as leading with alignment.



Dr. Marline Francois-Madden is a nationally recognized thought leader, an Assistant Professor at Morgan State University, a bestselling author of *The State of Black Girls*, a licensed therapist, a speaker, and a researcher. She has over 18 years of experience in the mental health field and has become a sought-after expert in adolescent mental health and racial identity. Dr. Marline has shared her expertise at dozens of universities, colleges, community organizations, churches, and conferences. Mindfully intersecting the connections between black girls, policy, and mental health,

**Dr. Marline Francois-Madden,
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Dr. Marline is a pivotal force who makes it her mission to create equity in black mental health with the astute awareness that equity and equality are not the same thing.

Dr. Marline holds a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Penn State University and a Master of Social Work from Rutgers University–Newark. She completed her Ph.D. in Family Sciences and Human Development at Montclair State University. She was named the 2020 Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers – New Jersey Chapter and was honored with the 2025 Alumni Achievement Award by Penn State University – Lehigh Valley campus. Her work has been featured in *Forbes*, *Essence*, ABC, CBS, WebMD, and dozens of media platforms regarding her expertise on the psychological well-being of youth. Dr. Marline is actively involved in her community and serves as a board member for several youth organizations.

Ready to transform your relationship with money? This interactive workshop tackles the confidence gap that keeps smart women from building the wealth they deserve. You'll discover why capable women often hesitate with financial decisions and learn the practical strategies that successful women use to overcome these barriers.

This session will include:

- Understanding the real reasons behind financial hesitation and helpful approaches to build confidence.
- Powerful mindset shifts with actionable tools for every career stage.
- Practical frameworks: Emergency fund strategies, investment basics, and wealth-building decisions.

Whether you're a student planning your first investment, a professional ready to maximize your wealth potential, or an entrepreneur scaling beyond your business success, you'll leave with specific tools, new connections, and the confidence to take immediate action.



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As Chief Operating Officer, Carol Ann is responsible for overseeing the 401(k) department and client retirement projections. Before joining Glen Eagle, Carol Ann worked in the Wealth Management Division at Merrill Lynch, Annuities Group at Prudential, and Global Capital Markets group at M&T Bank in New York City. Carol Ann earned a Bachelor of Science in finance from the University of Notre Dame in addition to later returning to Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business for her MBA. Carol Ann currently serves on the NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners) of Philadelphia committee.

We learned in science that change needs a catalyst, but what about in life? Many professionals in today's ever-changing work environment feel stuck, complacent, or even fearful about their professional growth. In order to get back on track, it is necessary to reconnect with their passion and establish their "WHY". In this inspiring program, Alana shares the events that ignited her life-changing catalyst to demonstrate how purpose and passion reinforce one's personal and professional goals. Through powerful storytelling, she will take the audience on a journey through their stories to discover their passions, talents, and path to being more resilient leaders. Alana's interactive delivery will leave the audience with immediate steps to move them forward in growth at work and home.



Alana M. Hill, PMP, CSP

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Participants will work the next chapter by sketching a potential book to author in the session. Using blank canvas books, students will create a book reflective of her story. As a collaborative group, participants will view videos, discuss strategies, techniques for ownership over valuable experiences that lead to leadership, entrepreneurship, and post-secondary education.



Bernadette Williams

Bernadette Williams is the Founder and President of Education Designs Unlimited Services, LLC. Previously, she served as an educator in Washington State & New Jersey's public schools in teaching and administrative positions. Bernadette holds a dual Master's Degree from St. John's University in Jamaica, New York with a specialization in Language Arts Literacy Studies & School Administration. Certified in several research-based literacy programs, her clients include Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Kean University, and several public schools in Connecticut and New Jersey. Additionally, Ms. Williams is currently finishing her Doctorate in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment at Walden University, providing depth and acumen to her resourceful educational attributes. Ms. Williams has been providing workshops and professional development services around the United States in vast areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Strength is often presented as a polished success story, but Vernita knows it usually looks more like a frantic first draft. This session invites women leaders to rethink what it means to keep going, especially in environments where endurance is celebrated and burnout is quietly ignored. Through humor and personal storytelling, Vernita explores how the pressure to power through can slowly work against our mental and emotional well-being.

Using the theme of writing your own story, participants are encouraged to pause in the middle of the chapter, reconsider how they are carrying their challenges, and begin making intentional edits that protect their energy without losing their impact. Attendees will leave with a renewed perspective and a reminder that resilience doesn't have to be pretty to be powerful.



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what promises to be a meaningful and empowering event.

About the session: Your story is evolving. Is your leadership style keeping up? In Chapter I: The Hustle, we focused on Proving Capability. We fueled our growth with External Validation, mastered the art of the “Yes, and...”, and measured our worth through Titles and Output. It got us here—but it won’t take us there. Welcome to Chapter II: The Harmony. This is the season of Protecting Capacity over just producing it. In this session, we shift our internal compass toward Internal Purpose, replace the “hustle” with a strategic “No, unless...”, and redefine success by the only metrics that truly last: Impact and Vitality. It’s time to stop writing for the audience and start writing for the lead character. Join us as we edit the script, protect our power, and design a leadership narrative that is as vibrant as it is influential.



Shavonne Reed

Shavonne Reed is a self-advocacy coach, author, and the visionary CEO of OPUA Agency and the Future Health NOW Foundation. In her book, *The Ugly Duckling: What You See Is Not What You Get*, Shavonne chronicles her journey from seeking external validation to embracing internal brilliance. A passionate advocate for health and wellness, she empowers women to shift from the “Hustle” to “Harmony,” helping them protect their capacity and lead with authentic vitality.

"There is no greater agony
than bearing an untold
story inside you."

- Maya Angelou



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The Deputy's Circle: Her Voice, Her Story



Deputy Superintendent
Yolonda Severe



Sadia White
Executive Mentor

The Deputy's Circle is a dedicated space within our conference where women in leadership positions share their personal and professional stories. This feature emphasizes the importance of women's voices in shaping the narrative of leadership and success. Through candid conversations and inspiring tales, we aim to create a platform that celebrates diversity, resilience, and the transformative power of storytelling.

Objectives of The Deputy's Circle

- **Empowerment Through Storytelling:** By sharing their journeys, women leaders empower others to find their own voices and write their own stories. These narratives serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for emerging leaders.
- **Building Community:** The Deputy's Circle fosters a sense of community among women leaders, encouraging collaboration and support. Participants can connect over shared experiences and challenges, building a network of allies.
- **Celebrating Diversity:** Every story is unique, and The Deputy's Circle celebrates the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives that women bring to leadership roles. This diversity enriches our collective understanding and drives innovation.
- **Inspiring Change:** Storytelling is a powerful tool for change. By highlighting stories of overcoming obstacles and achieving success, The Deputy's Circle seeks to inspire participants to drive change within their own spheres of influence.

Join us at The Deputy's Circle: Her Voice, Her Story to listen, learn, and share in the collective wisdom of women leaders who are shaping the future. Together, let's celebrate the power of our voices and the impact of our stories in the world of leadership.



Committee Members



Deputy Superintendent Yolonda Severe
Assistant Superintendent Dr. Yolanda Mendez
Assistant Superintendent Carolyn Granato
Assistant Superintendent Sylvia Esteves

Kia Andrews
Denise Cromwell
Maria Dias
Claire Emmanuel
Nicole Gutierrez
Atia Hunter
Marialana Juliano
Mara Kaplan
Kaylee Manzano
Sharmaine McCree
Jennifer Medina
Jazleen Othman
Shanta Rodgers
Ivette Toledo
Ondia Wade
Shamere Williams

Thank You

Superintendent Roger León
Board President Hasani K. Council

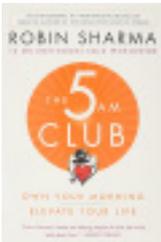
Yolonda Severe, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Yolanda Mendez, Assistant Superintendent
Carolyn Granato, Assistant Superintendent
Sylvia Esteves, Assistant Superintendent

Kia Andrews	Jazleen Othman
Jodi Carpenter	Brenda Pescoran
Jacquelin Chavis	Abigail Ram
Denise Cromwell	Nicole Ramdass
Maria Dias	Shanta Rodgers
Claire Emmanuel	Rob Salagaj
Nicole Gutierrez	Stephanie Santos
Atia Hunter	Anthony Spadavecchia
Marialana Juliano	Alberto Taveras
Mara Kaplan	Amanda Tobias
Kaylee Manzano	Ivette Toledo
Sharmaine McCree	Elizabeth Vizcaino
Jennifer Medina	Ondia Wade
Karisa Neis-Lopez	Sadia White
Anzella K. Nelms	Shamere Williams

Student Ambassadors, NBOE High School Administrators in attendance, Arts High School Female Student Performers and Staff, Malcolm X Shabazz High School Female Student Performers and Staff, Newark Vocational High School Staff: Print Shop, Culinary Arts Program, and Student Chefs, The Office of Special Education, The Office of Early Childhood, The Purchasing Department, The Division of Security Services, The Division of Information Technology, and Health Services.

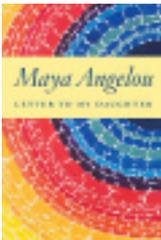
Presenters & Special Guests
Each and every woman participating in the
Women's Leadership Conference

Favorite Book List



Deputy Superintendent Yolonda Severe
"The 5AM Club: Own Your Morning. Elevate Your Life."

Written by Robin Sharma



Assistant Superintendent Sylvia Esteves

"Letter to My Daughter"

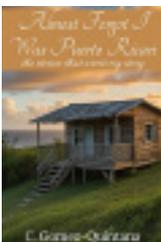
Written by Maya Angelou



Assistant Superintendent Carolyn Granato

"Theo of Golden"

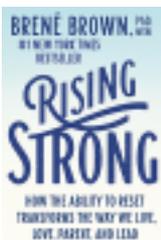
Written by Allen Levi



Assistant Superintendent Dr. Yolanda Mendez

"Almost Forgot I Was Puerto Rican: the stories that wrote my story"

Written by C. Gomez-Quintana



WLC Committee

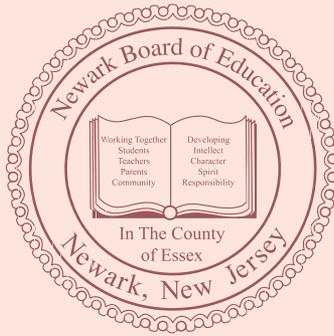
"Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead"

Written by Brené Brown, PhD. MSW

"I do know one thing about me: I don't measure myself by others' expectations or let others define my worth."

- Sonia Sotomayor





Roger León
Superintendent

Yolonda Severe
Deputy Superintendent

Board of Education

Hasani K. Council
President

Allison K. James-Frison
Co-Vice President

Vereliz Santana
Co-Vice President

Kanileah Anderson
David I. Daughety
Josephine C. Garcia
Louis Maisonave, Jr.
Melissa Reed
Helena Vinhas

Divine Kibe, Student Representative

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