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Women in Leadership Corner

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Leading with Vision, Voice, and Value: Reflections from the 9th Annual Women's Leadership Conference

The 9th Annual Women's Leadership Conference, centered on the theme "Leading with Vision, Voice, and Value," was more than a professional gathering; it was an energizing and affirming experience for women leaders in education. As someone who has attended this conference before, it continues to be one of my favorite professional learning experiences. The opportunity to engage with other women leaders who share a commitment to growth, service, and impact creates a space that is both inspiring and empowering.

Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean, the two-day conference at the Ocean Resort and Spa provided the perfect environment for reflection, learning, and connection. The setting itself reminded participants of the importance of stepping away from the pace of our daily responsibilities in order to recharge, think strategically, and connect with colleagues who understand the complexities and joys of leadership. I was particularly honored to have the East Brunswick High School Bella Voce Ensemble perform for us on the first day.



The conference featured powerful keynote speakers who challenged participants to lead authentically and boldly. Bonnie Taylor offered practical strategies to help leaders elevate their presence, strengthen their credibility, and communicate with confidence in every environment. Her message resonated deeply with many in the audience who continue to navigate leadership spaces where voice and visibility matter.

Dr. Janice Jackson shared insights from her leadership journey in Chicago Public Schools, highlighting the importance of intentionally developing leadership talent within school systems. She spoke about clarifying leadership progression, strengthening internal leadership pipelines, and ensuring that emerging leaders are supported every step of the way. Her reflections underscored a critical lesson for school systems: sustainable leadership requires deliberate investment in developing and mentoring the next generation of educational leaders.

Rosa Diaz also shared a compelling personal story, inviting participants to lead with intention, courage, and a commitment to creating impact that lasts. Her reflections reminded attendees that leadership is not simply about holding a position, but about using one's voice and influence to create opportunities and positive change for others.

Adding a unique and memorable dimension to the conference, author and storyteller Carmen Agra Deedy captivated the audience with humor and heart. Through a memorable story about an encounter with a school principal who profoundly influenced the trajectory of her educational journey, she reminded us of the powerful role educators and leaders play in shaping students' lives. Her storytelling had the audience laughing out loud while also reflecting on the lasting influence of compassionate leadership.

Beyond the keynote sessions, the conference offered a wide range of breakout sessions addressing key issues facing education today. Topics ranged from strengthening instructional leadership to prioritizing educator wellness and self-care. Many sessions reinforced the importance of lifting others as we lead: mentoring colleagues, supporting aspiring leaders, and creating professional cultures where collaboration and encouragement flourish.

Another highlight of the conference was the opportunity to network and share experiences with women leaders from across districts and roles. These conversations often become some of the most valuable learning moments, as participants exchange ideas, reflect on common challenges, and build professional relationships that extend well beyond the conference.

It was also encouraging to see male colleagues in attendance who came to support and learn alongside us. Their presence underscored an important truth: advancing leadership opportunities and voices for women strengthens the entire profession.

As the conference concluded, I left feeling both energized and motivated. I was reminded of why this work matters and inspired to continue striving to be better and do better for the communities we serve. Conferences like this do more than provide professional development; they renew our sense of purpose and reinforce the importance of leading with vision, voice, and value.

For educational leaders, opportunities to reflect, connect, and learn together are essential. The Women's Leadership Conference continues to be a powerful space where those opportunities flourish, and I look forward to carrying the lessons from this experience into my work and leadership in the months ahead.