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Annual Workshop Puts Aspiring Superintendents on Path Towards Success

YORKTOWN, NY, May 1, 2019 – The Aspiring Superintendents Workshop, held at Putnam | Northern Westchester BOCES on April 25, 2019, gave educators considering pursuing the top job in district leadership an opportunity to speak with superintendents about the role as well as time to reflect on their potential next steps and network with those on similar career paths.

Some, like Dana Castine, Director for Math, Science, and Technology at Florida Union Free School District, and Mark Mensch, Athletic Director at Westhampton Beach School District, were mulling over the superintendency as a possible direction.

Others, like Lisa Castaldo, who had just been named acting superintendent for Suffern Central School District, and Dr. Jonathan Gastel, who had just accepted the top position at Tsinglan School in southern China, were looking for more actionable insights.

The annual workshop is a cornerstone program of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) and the Leadership for Educational Achievement Foundation (LEAF) in collaboration with BOCES' Center for Educational Leadership.

“I attended this workshop in Albany in the mid-1980s,” said Dr. James Ryan, District Superintendent of BOCES, in his welcome. “Today is an opportunity to hear from people a few steps ahead of you as well as seasoned superintendents who have done great things.”

“We host this workshop in order to get the deepest pool of the most qualified people possible to apply for the superintendency,” said Dr. Charles Dedrick, Executive Director of NYSCOSS. He and Jacinda Conboy, General Counsel for NYSCOSS—whose work includes negotiating superintendents' contracts—opened the day with a nuts and bolts session on interviewing, resumes, and qualifications.

The heart of the workshop was access to superintendents in an environment where they could speak frankly about their work. Their perspectives included a sense of wonder and mission. One spoke about the “one thousand miracles that come through the doors each day,” while another said, “Being a superintendent is the imperfect, perfect role for you to change lives.”

“Networking with New and Newer Superintendents” panelists highlighted keys to their first-year success. Dr. Phil Benante, Superintendent of Haldane Central School District, revealed the importance of new superintendents' monthly meetings and problem solving together. Anthony DiCarlo, Superintendent of Mahopac Central School District, spoke about the power of getting to know each member of his board of education individually. Dr. Deborah O'Connell, Superintendent of Croton-Harmon Union Free School District, shared how BOCES helped her create a retreat for her cabinet, strengthening her relationships with those colleagues. David Mauricio, Superintendent of Peekskill City School District, touched on his commitment to balancing his personal-professional life.

“Setting the Stage for a Successful First Year in the Superintendency” featured Dr. Ron Hattar, Superintendent of Yorktown Central School District, and Andrew Selesnick, Superintendent of Katonah-Lewisboro School District. Each highlighted the value of a key message in advancing priorities and creating cohesiveness. Yorktown added empathy into the district-wide STEAM curriculum, making ESTEAM—meaning empathy, science, technology engineering, arts and math. Katonah-Lewisboro coalesced around the KL Learning Commitment—prioritizing a relevant, engaging, active learning environment across all disciplines.

With over twenty combined years as superintendents, Dr. Ray Blanch, Superintendent of Somers Central School District, and Mary Fox-Alter, Superintendent of Pleasantville Central School District, led a panel discussion on helping participants know if the superintendency was the right path for them. They framed the discussion in terms of leadership.

“If you lead with your heart, you will do fine,” said Dr. Blanch.

“Know who you are and be confident in your strengths,” added Fox-Alter.

The workshop closed with an action plan for the aspiring superintendents. Vreneli Banks, Director of LEAF, highlighted the Pathways to the Superintendency program and Future Superintendents Academy as next steps.

“Your success is our success,” said Dr. Lynn Allen, Assistant Superintendent of BOCES. “We believe in you so believe in yourself.”