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Women in Educational Leadership

Seventy-six percent of teachers nationally are women, yet only 27 percent hold the top job of school superintendent. Statistics like that led Jazz Conboy, general counsel of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, and Lynn Allen, assistant superintendent of Putnam | Northern Westchester BOCES, to organize a retreat entitled "Supporting Women in Educational Leadership."

The daylong event, held Thursday at the Edith Macy Conference Center in Briarcliff, brought together female school leaders from across the state to network, mentor, reflect and as Sheryl Sandberg has famously said, "lean in." Attendees included superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors, principals, assistant principals and others.

Participants explored best practices for mentoring and being mentored in the workplace. Deborah O'Connell, assistant superintendent in Croton-Harmon Union Free School District, urged attendees to think about the qualities of a truly good mentor. To which, participants said, good mentors were trustworthy, approachable, expert, non-judgmental and generous with their time, among other things.

"Instead of trying to find and define a mentor, look at the landscape, know where you want to go and look for the resources who will help move you forward," said O'Connell. "If you excel at defining your goals, the mentor will follow."

She also said that women have to get better at sponsoring one another. That means highlighting a female colleague's accomplishments and skills and providing access and opportunity for her to advance.

Frances Wills, superintendent of Putnam Valley Central School District, and Diana Bowers, superintendent of Haldane School District, led a session on the critical need for courage in leadership. Wills spoke about taking inspiration from female leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt and Anne Frank when she needs courage to tackle a situation.

Conboy said she was motivated to do something to support women in leadership not only by the lack of female school leaders but by the stories she heard from female superintendents who seemed to face more hostility in their positions than their male counterparts.

"I was hearing from superintendents who required a police escort after board meetings," she said. "I thought we need to do something to change the landscape. We need to do more to support women in leadership, to identify, cultivate and develop leadership potential in women educators."

Judging by comments from attendees and the fact that a second retreat will be held to accommodate all those who wished to attend, it would seem the retreat was a success.

Service and Innovation Through Partnership

“This workshop has really helped me to not only reflect on my past and the great mentors I have had along the way, it has better prepared me to be an effective mentor to others,” said Nicole Wolfe, assistant superintendent at Union Endicott School District. “It really has been an inspiring day.”

Natalie Doherty, assistant superintendent for Pupil Personnel and Human Resources in Putnam Valley, said “This workshop has made me realize that I should have more confidence in my ability to mentor people now that I have had an experience of having a true mentor. It has brought mentoring full circle and helped me to see that I should pass it along, that I can be a strong mentor.”

The retreat was jointly sponsored by the The Council and PNW BOCES.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

08-12-16WIEL1.jpg Deborah O’Connell, assistant superintendent in the Croton Harmon Union Free School District, urges participants in the Women in Educational Leadership retreat sponsored by the NYS Council of School Superintendents and PNW BOCES to seek opportunities to promote and mentor women as leaders.

08-12-16WIEL2.jpg Participants in the Women in Educational Leadership retreat sponsored by the NYS Council of School Superintendents and PNW BOCES discuss ways to strategically support women in the workplace and to find the resources and support they need for their own advancement.

08-12-16WIEL3.jpg Participants in the Women in Educational Leadership retreat sponsored by the NYS Council of School Superintendents and PNW BOCES pause for a group photo to commemorate the event.