



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PANEL DISCUSSION MAY 23, 2024

Agenda

- 9:00AM** **Welcome**
Cherese Odukwe & Henry Rondon, CAS-CIAC
Emily Tessier, Berlin High School, Student Moderator
- 9:05AM** **Panel Discussion**
- 10:05AM** **Break/Transition**
- 10:20AM** **Breakout Session**
- 11:20AM** **Dismissal**



EMILY TESSIER - STUDENT MODERATOR

Emily Tessier is a Berlin High School junior who is very involved in the Music & Theatre Arts department. She is a member of the drama club, performs in school musicals, and sings in the chorus. Emily is also a dancer, performing with her dance studio and volunteering as a teaching assistant for younger dance students. Most recently, Emily was seen on stage as Morticia Addams in the BHS production of The Addams Family.

Panelists



DR. MADELINE NEGRÓN **SUPERINTENDENT, NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Dr. Madeline Negrón became Superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools in July 2023. She has spent her professional career as an educator in Connecticut urban environments rich with cultural and linguistic diversity.

Most recently, she was Acting Deputy Superintendent of Academics and School Leadership for the Hartford Public Schools; she had previously served as Chief of Academics, Teaching, Learning and Student Supports.

Dr. Madeline Negrón became Superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools in July 2023. She has spent her professional career as an educator in Connecticut urban environments rich with cultural and linguistic diversity. Most recently, she was Acting Deputy Superintendent of Academics and School Leadership for the Hartford Public Schools; she had previously served as Chief of Academics, Teaching, Learning and Student Supports.

Dr. Negrón knows New Haven well, having served as a former Director of Instruction and Director of Early Childhood for the New Haven Public Schools and both as the principal and earlier as a classroom teacher at Hill Regional Career Magnet High School.

Dr. Negrón also dedicated over 10 years of service at Windham Middle School, located in Willimantic, where her family settled after moving from the island of Puerto Rico to the mainland.

Her personal experience as a multilingual learner in the Connecticut public educational system has resulted in her life's passion for equity and excellence in schools.

Dr. Negrón has over 25 years of public education experience, comprised of elementary and secondary instruction, administrative site leadership, as well as university level experience having served as a faculty adjunct in the Educational Leadership Department at Southern Connecticut State University. She began her career as a bilingual education teacher and has worked as an assistant principal, principal, central office administrator and as a senior executive level administrator.

Dr. Negrón is proud to be a first-generation college graduate. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Spanish from Central Connecticut State University, a Master of Arts degree in Education with a minor in Bilingual Bicultural Education and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Negrón is a co-founder and Past-President of the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents. She currently serves in various local and state committees. She has been a member of the CSDE Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council since 2016. On a national level she has had strong networking opportunities to be abreast of the latest developments and strategies to address learning loss and acceleration post-pandemic.

Dr. Negrón and her husband are the proud parents of a daughter who graduated from New Haven Public Schools and currently attends Southern Connecticut State University. She is an inspiration and reminder about the promise of public education and the strong future that every child deserves to make their hopes and dreams come true.



KATIE M. AMENTA **PRINCIPAL, BERLIN HIGH SCHOOL**

Mrs. Amenta is the proud Principal of Berlin High School and has dedicated the last seventeen years to building a positive culture and climate within the Berlin school community. Mrs. Amenta taught English and Capstone for twelve years at Berlin High School, where she also served as the Women's Soccer coach for ten of those years. She was spotlighted for District Teacher of the year in 2017 and a semi-finalist for CT State Teacher of the Year in 2018. After serving as an Assistant Principal for three years, Mrs. Amenta was appointed Principal last June. Mrs. Amenta was recognized for serving as the youngest Principal in Berlin High School history, and as the second female acting Principal in school history. Mrs. Amenta was formerly a Division I athlete and holds degrees from Central Connecticut State University, Quinnipiac University, and Sacred Heart University. Mrs. Amenta's roots are forever embedded in Berlin High School as she is a Berlin High School graduate herself and is devoted to continuing the deep traditions and school spirit she cares so deeply about. Outside of her professional life, Mrs. Amenta notes her most important role of all, mother to two amazing daughters. Mrs. Amenta continues to be very involved in youth sports and believes that all young women deserve the building blocks to overcome the barriers in their lives.

***KATIE IS ALSO A BREAKOUT PRESENTER**



ARIANA MOHAMED **STUDENT, NEW BRITAIN HIGH SCHOOL**

Ariana is a senior at New Britain High School. She is very involved in her school community. She is a student representative for her Board of Education in New Britain. She is also a part of her class council, president of Trio Student Ambassadors, and part of the State Student Advisory Council on Education. She is very passionate about student advocacy and works in her community to get the best for students. Ariana hopes to pursue a degree in communications for a future career in journalism.

***ARIANA IS ALSO A BREAKOUT PRESENTER**



DR. CHERYL HASKES

OPTOMETRIST, VETERAN AFFAIRS

Dr. Cheryl Haskes is a native of Connecticut who practices Optometry at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Connecticut Healthcare system, West Haven and Newington campuses. She attended Seton Hall University and earned a B.S. in Biology. She subsequently obtained her Doctor of Optometry (O.D.) degree at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry. She furthered her training by completing a Residency in Hospital-Based Optometry/Ocular Disease at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, Newington campus.

After practicing in the private sector for several years, Dr. Haskes returned to the VA as an attending Optometrist where her duties include direct patient care as well as teaching and mentoring Optometry residents and student externs. She has been there for the past 21 years.

She is also a Staff Optometrist providing direct patient care at the Yale Health Center in New Haven.

Dr. Haskes has been a writer and examiner for the Optometry National Board Examination. She has published several articles in peer-reviewed Optometry journals.

Outside of work, Dr. Haskes is the mother of three children and is actively involved in their activities. She enjoys running, biking, pickleball, crafting, and travel.



AYAH GALAL

HARTFORD BUREAU CHIEF, WFSB-TV

Ayah Galal is the Hartford Bureau Chief at WFSB-TV. Ayah joined the Eyewitness News team in 2018. In December 2021, she made history, becoming the first woman in hijab to anchor a newscast in Connecticut. Ayah graduated from Quinnipiac University, where she double majored in journalism and political science. She is passionate about diverse representation in media and loves reading, traveling and trying new coffee shops in Connecticut.



ELISHA DEJESUS DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS, MIDDLETOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Elisha De Jesús is the Director of Athletics, Student Activities, Physical Education & Health for the Middletown Public School System in Connecticut. In this role De Jesús oversees 35 varsity athletic programs, over 40 sublevel athletic programs, 42 clubs and activities, as well as the PE and Health programs across the district. De Jesús was born in Hartford, CT and raised in East Hartford, CT.

High School

- 1999 graduate of East Hartford High School where she is the all-time leading East Hartford High School scorer, for boys & girls basketball, with 2,020 points.
- USA CT Basketball Player of the year & Hartford Courant Basketball Player of the year
- East Hartford High Schools CIAC Female Scholar Athlete - 1999

Marist College:

- Attended Marist College on a full Division I basketball scholarship and graduated in 2003 as a Dean's List student with a BA in Psychology Special/Elementary Education.

Professional Basketball Career:

- Following graduation, De Jesús continued her basketball career playing professionally for Puerto Rico until 2007 with Las Criollas de Caguas and Las Leonas de Ponce.

Professional Career:

- De Jesús' educational career includes work in CT and NY with varied positions in PE, athletics, coaching, and work as a Dean of students as she completed a second Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, from New England College.
- De Jesús currently participates on the Board of Directors and is President Elect for the National Organization for Minority Athletic Directors (NOMAD).
- She is a member of the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) Diversity Equity and Inclusion Belonging Committee.
- Member of the CAAD board as the DEIB rep and the CCC league rep.

Middletown Highlights:

- Advocated for Assistant coaches at the middle school level
- Created the Jim Bransfield Legacy Award, which recognizes the 3 sport student-athlete (by senior year, the student has completed 12 sport seasons)
- Organized the MHS Senior Student Athlete signing day in the Spring of every year where families and student athletes are recognized for playing at the next level.

Personal/Family Information:

- Education runs in the family for De Jesús. Both parents, Federico & Carmen De Jesús, were long-time educators for Hartford Public schools; serving for a combined 70 years.
- Elisha's determination, work ethic, and passion for education are inherited from her parents.

De Jesus intends to inspire and motivate by leading by example and learning from experience.

She is passionate about creating spaces where students feel a sense of belonging, where she can help provide equitable opportunities so all students can succeed in high school and in life.

In her role as Athletic Administrator, she wants to provide experiences through clubs, & through sports so students have a chance to develop lifelong friendships, so they have a chance to develop the ability to collaborate and to grow as individuals engaging in new experiences as a result of their access to programming that they are interested in. This is what drives her, this is what motivates her.

De Jesús is devoted to equity in athletics and works to create inclusive spaces for Athletic Administrators across the country.

Breakout Presenters



EIRA PRAKASH STUDENT, FARMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

Eira Prakash is a senior at Farmington high school who has been involved in leadership since she was young. She is currently Executive President of her Student Council, Co-President of Asian American Student Union, Generations, and the Book Lovers clubs at her school. Outside of school, she enjoys debate, and has had many teaching roles mentoring younger students. Eira is attending Barnard College next year, and is excited to start a new adventure in the city!



GABRIELLA DEJESUS BROWN ASSISTANT ATHLETIC DIRECTOR, CREC SCHOOLS

Gabriella DeJesus Brown is a dynamic leader and youth advocate whose journey began at the Academy of Science and Innovation, where her passion for leadership was ignited. Throughout her high school years, she actively engaged in various leadership roles, culminating in her presidency of the CREC Student Senate, a pivotal experience that laid the foundation for her future endeavors. Driven by a commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity, Gabriella leveraged her leadership skills as the founding President of the Multicultural Scholars Collective at Elms College. During her time at Elms, she played soccer, graduated from the first honors program in the institution history with cum laude honors and earning a degree in psychology. Her dedication to academic excellence was matched only by her active involvement in campus committees, where she played an instrumental role in shaping the student experience. Gabriella's passion for mentorship and youth development led her to work with students aged 11-15 at Camp Courant and the West Springfield Boys & Girls Club, where she made a lasting impact on countless young lives. In August 2023, she joined CREC as District Assistant Athletic Director, bringing her unique blend of leadership, creativity, and unwavering dedication to her role. Gabriella is driven by a desire to lead by example, inspiring those around her to reach their full potential. Her commitment to youth empowerment and community engagement continues to shape her professional journey, as she remains steadfast in her mission to make a difference in the lives of others.

Breakout Presenters



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