



CT LeadHERship Collective's Spring Forum

PANELISTS

April 28, 2026



DONNA HAYWARD

Principal, Haddam-Killingworth High School
2023 National Principal of the Year

Donna Hayward has served as a high school administrator for over 25 years in Connecticut. Having received her degrees from Smith College and UCONN, she served as Assistant Principal/ Principal of Rocky Hill High School for a decade, markedly expanding student opportunities and increasing student achievement while reducing discipline. She was honored as the Connecticut Assistant Principal of the Year in 2006. Donna then served as Principal of Suffield High School for six years, during which time she opened a new Agriscience center and led her school to exceed prior academic performance in all areas. She now serves as Principal of Haddam Killingworth High School, which earned the National Blue Ribbon in her fourth year. She was named the CT Principal of the Year in 2022 and NASSP's National Principal of the Year for 2023. She serves on the NASSP Board of Directors and teaches in UCONN's Administrator Preparation Program.



LASHANTÉ JAMES

Assistant Principal, Brien McMahon High School
2025 CT High School Assistant Principal of the Year

LaShanté James is an accomplished educator and school leader dedicated to equity, leadership development, and student empowerment. Educated in the New Haven Public Schools, she graduated high school at just 16 through the Outstanding High School Program, earning a full scholarship to the University of New Haven.

She holds a Bachelor of Science in English Education and a Master of Science in Political Science with a concentration in Urban Education from Southern Connecticut State University, where she served as President of the Black Student Union and was crowned Miss SCSU. She later earned her 092 certification and Sixth-Year degree from Sacred Heart University.

After 11 years as a high school English teacher in New Haven, LaShanté now serves as an Assistant Principal in Norwalk Public Schools. In 2025, she was named the CAS High School Assistant Principal of the Year—the first recipient from Norwalk.

Beyond her school role, she leads a districtwide girls' empowerment and leadership program in partnership with My Sister's Keeper and serves on the Stratford Board of Education Curriculum Committee. She has also held numerous community leadership roles, including alumni and nonprofit board leadership across Connecticut.



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DR. SYDNEY LEGGETT

Superintendent, Regional School District #13
Durham-Middlefield

Dr. Sydney Leggett earned her Bachelor of Arts with a double major in English and Religion from Oberlin College and studied as a visiting student at Harvard University. She went on to receive her Master of Education from St. Michael's College, an Educational Specialist degree in Administration and Supervision from the University of New Hampshire, and a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from Southern New Hampshire University. She also holds a certificate in Special and Inclusive Leadership from the University of Kansas.

She is currently the Superintendent of Schools in Regional School District 13 and served as a superintendent in New Hampshire for the past eight years. Beyond her district leadership, Dr. Leggett is the co-founder and president of Women Educators Leading Learning New England (WELLNE), a nonprofit organization supporting women in educational leadership. She has also served as an adjunct instructor in graduate education programs and held administrative and curriculum leadership positions at the building and district levels.



JAN PERRUCCIO

CAPSS Associate for Legislative Affairs
2023 CT Superintendent of the Year

Jan Perruccio has been an educator for 37 years beginning as a high school teacher of English and going on to become a high school building administrator, assistant superintendent for personnel, and superintendent of schools. She served as Superintendent of Old Saybrook Public Schools for nearly eleven years, retiring in 2024. She was the CT Association of Public Schools (CAPSS) Superintendent of the Year in 2023.

Jan has led long term strategic planning and visioning work in multiple districts and has been very involved in legislative work on behalf of superintendents and school districts. Currently, she serves as the Associate of Legislative Affairs and is chair of the Women's Committee at CAPSS. In addition, she serves as an instructor at Central Connecticut State University in the educational leadership department.