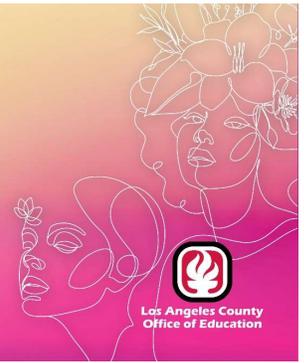


Los Angeles County Office of Education Presents

RISE UP!

The Women's Leadership and Empowerment Conference

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026



Session 1: Workshops

Workshop Title: Advancing as Women Leaders in Traditionally Male Spaces: Practical Approaches for Education Professionals

Co-Presenters: Jessica Ehrlich, J.D., Latasha Jamal, Assistant Superintendent Business Services, Denise Jaramillo, Ed.D, Superintendent, Catherine Kawaguchi, Ed.D, Superintendent, Nicole Wesley, Ed.D, Superintendent

District/Organizations: F3 Law, Azusa USD, Alhambra USD, Sulphur Springs Union SD, Redondo Beach USD

Presenter Bios: Jessica Ehrlich counsels K–12 school districts, community college districts, and other public agencies across California on all things “dirt and money”—construction, facilities programs, procurement, property matters, and land use and environmental issues. From bond-funded programs to ribbon-cuttings, she helps clients turn big ideas into lasting community assets. Known for her foresight, meticulous preparation, and practical problem-solving, Jessica guides districts and agencies through every phase of capital projects while safeguarding public trust and taxpayer dollars.

Ms. Jamal serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, bringing more than 14 years of experience in K–12 fiscal leadership. She holds a bachelor's degree in Accounting, a master's degree in Business Administration, and a Chief Business Official certification, and is an active member of both ACSA and CASBO. Throughout her career, she has held multiple roles within fiscal services and is known for her intentional decision-making, strategic career development, and commitment to empowering others through knowledge sharing. In her current role, she oversees all administrative and business operations on behalf of the Superintendent, ensuring that district resources are managed effectively to maximize support for instruction and student achievement. She is recognized for her readiness to tackle complex challenges and her dedication to continuous learning and professional growth.

Dr. Denise R. Jaramillo has served as Superintendent of the Alhambra Unified School District since 2017, following a long career in AUSD that began in 1987 as a classroom and GATE teacher. Over the years, she held multiple leadership roles, including principal, curriculum director, fiscal services director, and Assistant Superintendent of Financial Services. A San Gabriel Valley native and Mark Keppel High School alumna, she values the opportunity to serve the community that shaped her. She holds advanced degrees from CSULA, Pepperdine University, and the University of Massachusetts, along with a Chief Business Official Certificate from USC. Dr. Jaramillo is also active in the Rotary Club of Alhambra and was named the Alhambra Education Foundation's 2016 Educator of the Year.

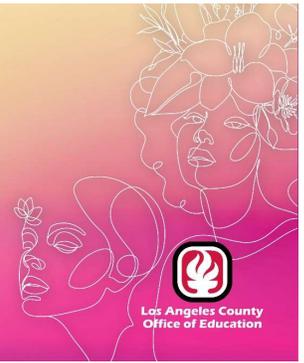
Dr. Kawaguchi has served as Superintendent of the Sulphur Springs Union School District since 2015, following earlier roles as Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, principal, assistant principal, and 15 years as

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a classroom teacher. She holds a bachelor's degree from UC Santa Barbara, a master's in Educational Administration from California Lutheran University, and a Doctor of Education from the University of Southern California. Throughout her career, she has fostered a culture of collaboration and partnership with staff, families, and the community to advance excellence for all students. A recipient of the 2019–20 ACSA Marcus Foster Memorial Award for Administrator Excellence, Dr. Kawaguchi is dedicated to ensuring that every student is supported academically and socially.

Dr. Nicole Wesley is the Superintendent of the Redondo Beach Unified School District, having started in January 2023. She has over 19 years of experience in the district, previously serving as an assistant superintendent and principal, and holds degrees from UCLA and California State University, Dominguez Hills.

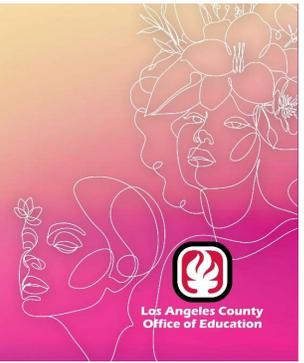
Description of Session: Across the education landscape, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in senior-level positions—particularly in fields such as facilities management, financial oversight, and governance, where complex policy and legal considerations often drive decision-making. Women leaders frequently encounter obstacles related to credibility, influence, and access, even as they shoulder substantial responsibility in their roles. This conversation features experienced education attorneys who have built successful careers in a legal sector that remains heavily male-dominated while partnering closely with women leaders throughout California's education systems. Drawing on their professional journeys and their work advising districts, county offices, and higher-level administrators, the panelists will discuss the systemic challenges that persist and share grounded, actionable strategies for navigating established power dynamics, strengthening leadership presence, and opening doors to equitable participation in decision-making arenas. Designed for both rising and established education professionals, this session will offer guidance and encouragement for women seeking to lead with confidence and impact within complex institutional structures.

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Workshop Title: Healing in Motion: Self-Care for Women Who Do Everything

Presenter: Flor Chaidez, Masters in Social Work, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

District/Organization: Chaidez Support Services

Presenter Bio: Flor Chaidez, MSW, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker, clinical supervisor, and community wellness advocate dedicated to strengthening the emotional well-being of women, youth, and families. With over a decade of experience in school-based mental health, telehealth practice, and trauma-informed care, Flor blends clinical expertise with accessible, heart-centered tools. She is the creator of Self-Care Sunday, a restorative wellness series offering meditation, yoga, and healing-centered workshops. Flor is also co-author of The Telemental Health Workbook and the founder of Chaidez Support Services, where she provides supervision, consultation, and culturally responsive training to uplift today's helping professionals.

Description of Session: Healing in Motion: Self-Care for Women Who Do Everything is a restorative and empowering workshop designed for women who often carry the emotional, mental, and physical weight of their families, workplaces, and communities. This presentation acknowledges the cultural expectations placed on women to be strong, self-sacrificing, and endlessly available—while offering a compassionate space to pause, breathe, and reconnect with themselves.

Grounded in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices, the session blends mediation, breathwork and reflective exercises to help participants release tension, recognize early signs of burnout, and identify what they may be carrying that is not truly theirs. Women are guided through accessible “micro-self-care” tools that can be integrated into even the busiest lives, along with a framework for setting boundaries and creating a personalized reset plan.

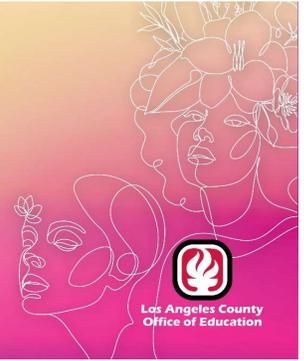
Above all, Healing in Motion reminds women that rest is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Through affirmation, education, and embodied practices, this presentation invites women to reclaim their energy, nurture their well-being, and move through the world with greater softness, strength, and intention.

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Workshop Title: Rise Through Story: Leading Change with the Power of Women's Voices

Co-Presenters: Maricela Ramirez, Ed.D and Leishay Bachler, Former LACOE Policy Council Chair

District/Organization: LACOE

Presenter Bios: Dr. Maricela Ramirez joined the Los Angeles County Office of Education in November 2016. She currently serves as the Chief Education Officer, overseeing Head Start and Early Learning, Specialized High Schools, and GAIN, with a fierce focus on advancing equity and access for all students. Prior to this role, she served as an Instructional Director and as both a high school and middle school principal, where she successfully led the implementation of dual enrollment programs. She began her career as a dedicated high school social studies teacher, a role she held for thirteen years.

The daughter of Mexican immigrants and a first-generation college graduate, Dr. Ramirez deeply understands the transformative power of education. She has three sons and resides in Los Angeles with her husband, an educator and their dog, Cajeta.

Leishay Bachler served for two years as LACOE Policy Council Chairperson and four years representing the Foundation for Early Childhood Education Agency. Additionally, she has served two years, contributing to subcommittees in education, transition, planning, and development, and supporting the Policy Council campaign. Along with her advocacy journey, she completed the Career Development Initiative program and also earned Family Development Credentials, strengthening her work with children and families. She is committed to uplifting community everywhere. Leishay is a proud mother of three, Aryeh (8), Akhillies (6), and Yahsiel (5) and always advocates for the best education for them.

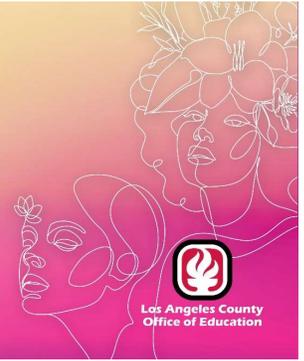
Description of Session: Stories shape how communities imagine possibility and how we see ourselves within that vision. In this interactive session, Dr. Maricela Ramirez, Chief Education Officer partners with LACOE Head Start Policy Council president (former), parent Leishay Bachler. They come together to explore storytelling as a powerful leadership practice that strengthens connection, amplifies marginalized voices, and drives meaningful, community centered change in educational spaces. Research shows that narratives activate empathy, deepen trust, and build collective efficacy, core drivers of healthy, equitable school cultures that support both students and the adults who serve them. When women share their stories, they challenge limiting beliefs, create pathways for healing, and model courageous leadership for those who follow. By weaving together our lived experiences, professional expertise, and community perspectives, we demonstrate how authentic storytelling can spark dialogue, inspire action, and build the relational capacity necessary for transformative work. Participants will explore practical tools to craft narratives that honor identity, advance equity, and strengthen partnerships between families, educators, and school communities. Together, we will illuminate how women's stories, when spoken, shared, and uplifted, can unify diverse voices across Los Angeles County and mobilize collective commitment to stronger, more inclusive educational outcomes for all students.

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Workshop Title: Promotion Power: Five Disruptive Career Moves for Modern Women

Co-Presenters: Dina Hernandez, Ed.D and Ruth Perez, Ed.D

District/Organization: LACOE

Presenter Bios: Dr. Dina Hernandez is an educational leader and author with over 25 years of experience advancing equity and leadership development across K–12 systems. As Director for Special Programs Support and Transformation at LACOE, she leads initiatives focused on coherence, transformation, and systemic change. Co-author of *Promotion Power: Five Disruptive Career Moves for Modern Women*, Dr. Hernandez empowers women to challenge barriers, embrace authentic leadership, and create pathways for equity and opportunity.

Dr. Ruth Pérez currently serves as the Deputy Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and is a nationally respected leader with executive experience in major school districts across the country. A former superintendent and senior instructional leader, she has led significant initiatives, including multimillion-dollar technology and facility improvements and scholarship expansion efforts.

Dr. Pérez is deeply committed to mentoring emerging leaders, drawing on her extensive superintendent experience to guide and support administrators pursuing higher leadership roles. Originally from Puerto Rico and a former English Language Learner, she is dedicated to advancing equity and improving outcomes for underserved students. She holds graduate degrees from Nova Southeastern University and a bachelor's degree from Queens College (CUNY).

Description of Session: How do women rise, lead, and thrive in systems not originally designed for them? Drawing from *Promotion Power: Five Disruptive Career Moves for Modern Women* and grounded in research, this interactive session equips women leaders with actionable strategies to accelerate their careers while staying rooted in authenticity and purpose. Participants will explore current data on women in leadership, unpack five transformative disruption skills including challenging authority, preparing and improvising, self-promotion, embracing non-linear career paths, and earning respect over likability, and reflect on how these behaviors can transform their professional trajectory.

The presentation also integrates lived leadership examples shared by Dr. Ruth Perez, whose experience demonstrates how disruption, courage, and coherence open doors for women across systems. The session concludes with a self-assessment and a call to action encouraging participants to create a personalized plan for growth.

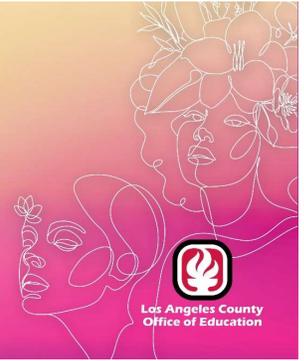
Attendees will leave empowered to harness their promotion power and lead with confidence, courage, and clarity while redefining what it means to rise and thrive as a modern woman in leadership.

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Workshop Title: Lean Into Your Strengths

Presenter: Jan Daisher, M. Ed.

District/Organization: William S. Hart UHSD

Presenter Bio: Jan Daisher started her career in education as a high school science teacher, falling in love with the art of teaching when she was choreographing in musical theatre. After going back to UCLA, and passing the teaching exams in life sciences, Jan taught Biology, Anatomy & Physiology, Health Sciences, Medical Techniques, and proudly created a medical internship program for students to shadow medical professionals in the community. She went on to become an ASB Director, cultivating student leaders, then a High School Assistant Principal, a Junior High School Principal, and the Director of Special Programs and Professional Development, all within the same school district where she started teaching 29 years ago. Jan has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Irvine, and a Master of Education from the University of La Verne.

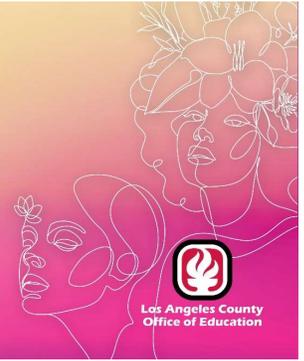
Description of Session: Women are gifted with so many unique strengths that drive the world of education for our students. This session will allow participants to identify their own leadership super powers and influence. Explore the mindsets, strengths, and communication strategies that support effective leadership, while addressing common barriers such as perfectionism, self-doubt, and disproportionate workload. The session highlights the unique leadership assets women bring to education, and provides practical tools for navigating challenging conversations, setting boundaries, and advocating for themselves. Through brief reflective activities, participants will identify their personal leadership strengths and develop next steps for continued growth through a collective commitment to supporting each other in leadership.

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Workshop Title: The Rings That Shape Us: Identity, Voice, and Agency

Presenter: Audra Mesa, MA

District/Organization: LACOE

Presenter Bio: Audra Mesa is a Senior Program Specialist with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). With over two decades of experience, she centers identity, equity, and inclusive leadership in her work with educators across the county. Her background in literacy, culturally responsive practice, and instructional coaching informs the professional learning she designs to honor the full variability of learners and uplift diverse voices. Audra is committed to helping educators and leaders explore how their lived experiences, cultural identities, and personal stories shape their presence, relationships, and agency. She believes that self-awareness and authentic connection are essential to meaningful, transformative leadership.

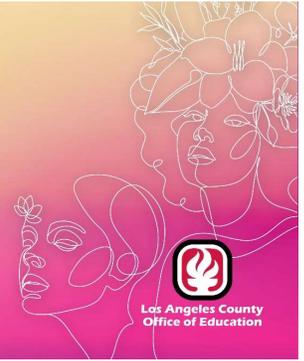
Description of Session: Our leadership is shaped by the many identities we hold – gender, language, race, generation, ability, family, culture, and more. This workshop uses the Rings of Culture to help participants explore how these intersecting identities influence their leadership voice and personal sense of agency. With a combination of storytelling, identity mapping, and creative narrative work, women will reflect on what feels core, what shifts, and what strengthens or diminishes their presence. This session supports personal growth through self-awareness, empowerment, and reclaiming authenticity in leadership.

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Session 2: Workshops

Workshop Title: Social Media Without the Fear: Building Your Professional Brand with Confidence

Co-Presenters: Noor Robinson and Elizabeth Graswich, Ed.D

District/Organization: LACOE

Presenter Bios: Noor Robinson is a Public Information Officer at the Los Angeles County Office of Education, where she leads communications for the nation's largest regional education agency. Before joining LACOE, she spent over a decade in Los Angeles radio, working with Power 106, KIIS FM and KOST. With deep roots in broadcasting, social media and strategic communications, Noor brings creativity, authenticity and a strong connection to the communities she serves.

Dr. Elizabeth Graswich is a communications leader with over 20 years of expertise in public education, communications, policy and media. Prior cabinet-level leadership roles include Communications Director for the San Ramon Valley and Elk Grove unified school districts in Northern California. She honed her storytelling skills as a reporter for The Sacramento Bee. She served as a board member on multiple foundations, including her present role on the board of A Thousand Joys. An alumna of the University of Southern California, Graswich earned both her doctoral degree in Organizational Change and Leadership and her master's degree in Communication Management from USC.

Description of Session: If social media feels intimidating or if you've ever wondered, "What would I even post?" then this session is for you. We all do incredible work every day, yet many of us struggle to share our stories, highlight achievements or confidently build a presence on platforms like LinkedIn. This friendly, step-by-step workshop will show you how simple and approachable personal branding can be. We'll walk through easy ways to refresh your profile, talk about your accomplishments without feeling boastful and create posts that feel authentic, not forced.

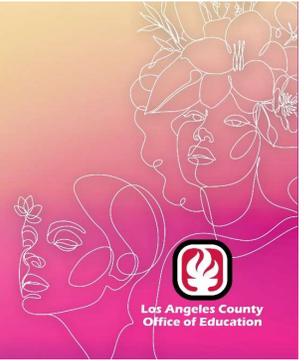
You'll learn how to market your work in a way that aligns with your voice, values and comfort level. Whether you're brand-new to LinkedIn or looking to grow your confidence, you'll leave inspired, supported and equipped with practical tools to help you shine online. Your work deserves to be seen and this session will help you share it with the world.

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Workshop Title: Own the Room (Even if you Tremble!)

Presenter: Benita Scheckel, Ed.D

District/Organization: Hacienda La Puente USD

Presenter Bio: Dr. Benita Scheckel is a passionate, experienced educational leader, arts advocate, and voiceover actress, having voiced the recurring role of Lacie on the hit Disney animated series, Phineas and Ferb. Drawing from her extensive experience as an Opera singer, musical theatre performer, and television guest star, Benita has been training students of all ages to find their voice using proven and effective vocal techniques to build strong, healthy speaking voices, whether for the stage, the classroom, the Boardroom or the family dinner table.

Description of Session: In a world overflowing with noise, the speakers who leave a lasting impact are those who speak not just with knowledge and expertise, but with vocal strength and clarity of message paired with confidence and authenticity.

But what about your voice? What if it shakes? What if you're nervous and feel like you might throw up? What about that high stakes Board meeting when you're exhausted and stressed or your next job interview to land that coveted promotion? How can you prepare yourself to really shine through with confidence and impact? This session will empower female leaders to find and refine their unique voice—one that resonates deeply with any audience; from the Boardroom to the classroom to the family dinner table.

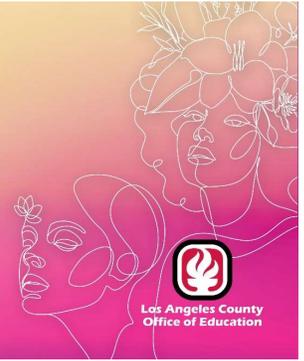
Through practical vocal and breathing exercises, real-world examples, and guided activities, attendees will learn how to build genuine confidence to craft more engaging narratives, that communicate with authenticity and power to truly Own the Room in any space Even if You Tremble!

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Workshop Title: The Phoenix Standard: How Women Lead, Heal, and Rebuild in Crisis

Co-Presenters: Kerry Franco and Jennifer Vanore, Ph.D., President & Chief Operating Officer

District/Organization: Greater Los Angeles Education Foundation and UniHealth Foundation

Presenter Bios: Kerry Franco is the President and Chief Deputy of Strategic Partnerships and Innovation at the Greater Los Angeles Education Foundation. Since 2022, she has helped lead major initiatives, including establishing a nearly \$13 million endowment to support youth in Inglewood. Kerry brings over 25 years of experience in nonprofit management, philanthropy, and student development, previously serving in leadership roles at the California Community Foundation and the University of Southern California. She has raised more than \$20 million for scholarships, student support, healthcare and medical research and helped manage over \$110 million in philanthropic assets. A first-generation college graduate and education advocate, Kerry's experiences have fueled her passion for supporting students, uplifting communities, and promoting equity.

Jen Vanore joined UniHealth Foundation in 2015 and was appointed President and COO in 2018. She is responsible for overseeing all grantmaking and the day-to-day functions of the Foundation. Jen previously served as the Foundation's Vice President of Programs, overseeing nearly \$15 million in grants in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. In addition, she previously served as a Program Manager for The California Endowment's Center for Healthy Communities, and has worked in clinic, hospital and social service settings. Jen received a PhD from the University of Chicago, an MA from Yale University and a BA from Vassar College. Jen is a member of the Board of Directors of [Southern California Grantmakers](#), and also sits on the Advisory Panel of the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#).

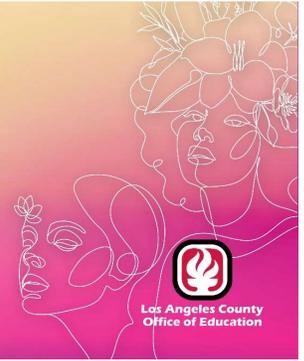
Description of Session: When crisis strikes, leadership is tested in profound and unexpected ways. This workshop brings together women senior leaders who guided their organizations through the Los Angeles wildfires while personally navigating the trauma and uncertainty the disaster brought. Through authentic storytelling, shared lessons, and collective wisdom, participants will explore what it truly means to lead with courage, clarity, and compassion during moments of extreme disruption. The session moves beyond theory into real-world crisis leadership, drawing on lived experience to examine preparation, rapid response, empathetic communication, operational pivots, and post-crisis recovery. Participants will gain practical, actionable strategies for maintaining continuity, supporting staff and students, and sustaining their own well-being when everything around them feels unstable. Designed to engage, empower, and support women in education across Los Angeles County, this workshop offers a powerful space to share vulnerabilities, strengthen networks, and transform reactive crisis management into proactive, resilient leadership. Together, we are stronger, especially in the moments that test us most.

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Workshop Title: Navigating Imposter Syndrome as a Woman of Color in Educational Leadership

Presenter: Malikah Nu'Man, Ed.D

District/Organization: William S. Hart UHSD

Presenter Bio: Dr. Malikah Nu'Man is an educational leader, adjunct professor, and restorative practices trainer with extensive experience supporting students with emotional and behavioral needs. She serves as the Coordinator of the Sequoia Program in the William S. Hart Union High School District, where she leads trauma informed, relationship centered systems that promote equity and belonging. Dr. Nu'Man is committed to empowering women in leadership through authenticity and reflective practice. Her work focuses on helping educators reconnect to purpose, build confidence, and lead with clarity while navigating the personal and systemic challenges of the profession.

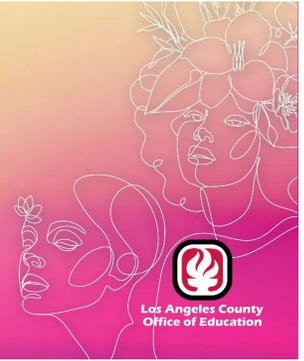
Description of Session: Women of color in educational leadership often navigate unique and complex challenges that can intensify feelings of self doubt and imposter syndrome. These internal experiences, shaped by personal history, professional expectations, and systemic pressures, can undermine confidence and affect one's ability to lead authentically. This session offers a reflective and empowering space for women to unpack these dynamics through a restorative and trauma informed lens. Participants will explore how identity, belonging, and leadership intersect, while engaging in guided reflection and dialogue that supports healing and self awareness. Dr. Malikah Nu'Man will share practical strategies for disrupting imposter syndrome, reclaiming confidence, and strengthening leadership presence. Attendees will leave with tools that promote clarity, grounding, and resilience as they continue their personal and professional journeys. This session is designed to engage, enlighten, and empower women seeking to lead with courage, authenticity, and a renewed sense of purpose.

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Workshop Title: Leadership, Resilience, and Well-Being for Women in Education

Presenter: Frances Baez, Ph.D

District/Organization: LAUSD

Presenter Bio: Dr. Frances Baez is the Chief Academic Officer in LAUSD. She earned her BA at UCLA, and MA in Educational Administration at California State University, Los Angeles and she recently earned a PhD in Urban Leadership at Claremont Graduate University. Dr. Baez has been an educator for 30 years in LA Unified and has led transformation as a school Principal, Instructional Director, Administrator of Instruction and Local District Superintendent leading increases in High School graduation, EL reclassification, and early literacy. In recent Smarter Balanced Assessment results, students have increased in achievement in literacy, numeracy and graduation as Chief Academic Officer.

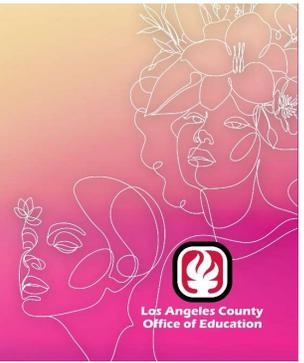
Description of Session: This session invites women leaders at every level to explore what it means to lead with clarity, confidence, and care in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape. Grounded in both research and lived experience, the workshop will highlight the unique strengths women bring to leadership and the pressures they often carry—both visible and invisible. Participants will examine practical strategies for sustaining personal well-being while navigating complex systems, managing competing demands, and championing equity and excellence for students and staff. Through reflection, dialogue, and interactive activities, attendees will learn how to cultivate resilience, build supportive networks, and create conditions for others to thrive. This session is designed to empower women in education to rise up as leaders who are not only effective, but also balanced, grounded, and whole.

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Workshop Title: Building Bridges: Co-Creating Educational Technology with Community Voices

Co-Presenters: Sasha Samochina, Founder, Executive Director and Barbara Fant, Poet, Voice Over Talent and Author

District/Organization: Some-Thing Foundation and Bloom Life Arts, LLC

Presenter Bios: Sasha Samochina is an Emmy award-winning creative director, technologist, and Executive Director of some-thing Foundation. She pioneered immersive tools for astronauts and scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and developed exhibitions at the Field Museum. Her career focuses on making STEAM education accessible to everyone through innovative technology and authentic storytelling. She founded some-thing Foundation in 2024 to fund STEAM education grants, taking 10% of profits from some-thing Company (founded in 2023). Sasha brings practical expertise in educational technology, immersive experiences, and equitable program design to her work with educators and institutions nationwide.

Originally from Youngstown, Ohio, award-winning poet Barbara Fant began writing at fifteen as a way to navigate grief and rediscover prayer after the loss of her mother. This private healing transformed into a prolific stage career; a veteran of nine National and World Poetry Slams, Barbara placed 8th in the 2017 Women of the World Poetry Slam and led her team to a 2008 Rustbelt Regional Championship. Her literary work includes her debut collection, which earned the Cora Craig Award, and her 2022 book, *Mouths of Garden*. For Barbara, art is a ministry and a tool for restoration. Beyond the stage, she has been commissioned by over 15 organizations and currently champions prison abolition with the Arts for Healing and Justice Network and JustMedia. She is dedicated to a life "poured out," using the spoken word to foster global healing.

Description of Session: Educational technology often gets developed in isolation from the educators who will use it. This interactive workshop flips that narrative. We'll guide participants through a collaborative exploration of what LA County educators truly need from emerging technologies—from immersive learning tools to AI integration—and how foundations can become genuine partners in this work rather than prescriptive funders. The session begins with a grounding art therapy exercise led by award-winning poet Barbara Fant, creating space for authentic reflection and connection. Then, some-thing Foundation's Executive Director Sasha Samochina and Barbara will facilitate small-group discussions to help participants articulate their technology pain points, dreams, and non-negotiables. We'll close by co-creating a framework for educator-foundation partnerships that centers accessibility, equity, and real classroom needs. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for advocating for their technology needs and connecting with funding sources that align with their values.