AASA launches new initiative to support, advance women in key school leadership positions

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, has launched a new initiative called More Than a Power Lunch: Building Networks to Support and Advance Women in School Leadership. The purpose of the project is to help mitigate the impact of social barriers women face in ascending to the top leadership positions within school systems and to significantly increase the number of women seeking and becoming CEOs and superintendents of schools.

According to AASA’s The Study of the American Superintendent: 2015 Mid-Decade Update [1], there has only been a modest increase in the leadership positions held by women in our nation’s school districts over the last decade. According to the study, out of the 845 respondents, 27 percent were female. As part of the new two-year initiative to support women in advancing into key school leadership positions, AASA will:

• Provide enhanced professional learning opportunities and greater recognition to female educational leaders by expanding its existing women’s leadership conferences, forums and awards program;

• Establish the AASA National Women’s Leadership Consortium, which will convene to discuss the barriers and challenges women face in the U.S. and develop a plan to address these issues within the scope of the project;

• Utilize the national consortium of women leaders to provide coaching and mentoring to a select group of aspiring female educational leaders;

• Connect the learnings from the initiative to practice by identifying and testing effective practices from the mentoring program that can be used in an online collaborative and in developing resources for other blended professional learning opportunities for aspiring leaders; and

• Create a national communications awareness campaign to raise awareness about the women’s leadership initiative, disseminate learnings and promote project resources.

AASA has recruited 10 successful women leaders, representing a variety of roles within the education and business community, to participate in the national consortium.
The members of the consortium include:

- Ann Blakeney Clark, Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, N.C.
- Jacinda H. Conboy, General Counsel, The New York State Council of School Superintendents, N.Y.
- Fatima Goss Graves, Senior Vice President for Program, National Women’s Law Center, Washington, D.C.
- Margaret Grogan, Dean of the College of Educational Studies, Chapman University, Calif.
- Patricia E. Neudecker, Consultant, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and Hazard Young and Attea, Wis.
- Cheryl A. Oldham, Vice President of Education Policy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C.
- Judith Rattner, Superintendent, Berkeley Heights District, N.J.
- Melody Schopp, South Dakota Secretary of Education, S.D.

“AASA is proud to be undertaking this historic project. Although many states and smaller organizations have women’s networks, there has never been one that encompasses today’s national thought leaders who can discuss the roles of women in the United States in leadership positions, especially ones that lead our school systems,” said Daniel A. Domenech, AASA executive director.

“For the past decade, AASA has been responding to the needs of women educational leaders by offering leadership forums and conferences so that women leaders can network and learn from each other. With the investment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we can now broaden our scope and provide a national forum to discuss issues and better address the needs of women aspiring into the school superintendency,” said MaryAnn Jobe, AASA director of education and leadership development.

The initiative is made possible by the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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