



Guilford County Schools

GCS Superintendent Finalist: Dr. Sharon L. Contreras

An advocate for providing high-quality education to all children, Dr. Contreras began her career as a high school English teacher, then went on to serve as a principal, area superintendent and assistant superintendent in Rockford, IL. Dr. Contreras has also served as the Chief Academic Officer for the Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia and in the Providence Public Schools in Rhode Island. Through the development of high-performing teams, work in those school districts resulted in improved graduation rates and access to rigorous academic programs for all students.

In 2011, Dr. Contreras became superintendent of the Syracuse City School District. Not only is she the first female superintendent of SCSD, but she is also the first woman of color in New York State's history to serve as superintendent of one of the Big 5 districts. Dr. Contreras has worked to make the District one of the most innovative urban school districts in the country guided by *Great Expectations 2012-2017*, the district's five-year strategic plan incorporating college, career and citizenship readiness. Her efforts include establishing an Innovation Zone that provides maximum operating flexibility for the lowest performing cluster of schools in the city, implementing extended learning time up to 300 hours per year in low-performing schools, and rolling out blended personalized learning to make education relevant, individualized and effective for students and teachers alike. The district has also realized a significant increase in its graduation rate, and the dropout rate has decreased by 10 percentage points after initiating the *You Can Finish* campaign. Her work with the community to make college accessible for all earned a visit to the district from President Barack Obama. And in March 2016, the State Education Department announced that nine of 18 underperforming schools that were placed in receivership would be removed from receivership status after having made significant academic progress.

Dr. Contreras has expanded high-quality, career technical programming for Syracuse students. Under her leadership, the District has established 16 new career pathways including Cybersecurity, Forensic Science, Geospatial Technology and Computer Forensics. She opened two P-TECH high schools to provide students the opportunity to earn an Associates Degree in Electrical Engineering Technology or Manufacturing Technology, or in one of several health fields. Dr. Contreras spearheaded the creation of Syracuse Latin School for gifted elementary students and the Public Service Leadership Academy (PSLA). In the Fall, PSLA will offer the nation's first high-school Drone Technology program. Dr. Contreras has worked with City and State elected officials to secure passage of state legislation that authorizes \$300 million in construction funding. This funding will enable the district to create 21st century educational learning environments in 14 schools and renovations to support new CTE programs.

In June 2015, Dr. Contreras negotiated a landmark contract with the teachers' union, making SCSD teachers the highest paid in the region over a five-year period. The increases were offset by a significant change in health insurance to a high-deductible health plan for all new teachers. Also under the agreement, the traditional salary schedule was replaced with a more progressive salary schedule.

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Understanding the need to address students' health and social-emotional needs, Dr. Contreras has introduced Breakfast-in-the-Classroom and universal free breakfast and lunch programs in all schools. In collaboration with Say Yes to Education and Onondaga County, the district expanded the Promise Zone program; the Promise Zone provides critical supports and resources to students with social-emotional or behavioral challenges. Impassioned to eradicate the school-to-prison pipeline, Dr. Contreras focuses on creating vibrant school communities, and introduced a new Code-of-Conduct based on restorative principles. She was recently invited to participate in a White House convening on school discipline and has conducted a briefing for members of the United States Congress on implementing fair disciplinary practices in schools.

Dr. Contreras currently serves on numerous boards and councils: the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS), NYS Board of Regents Blue Ribbon Work Group to Improve Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color, SYRACUSE 20/20, SCSD Educational Foundation, Near Westside Initiative, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, NYS Commissioner's Advisory Council, and the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

Dr. Contreras has won awards for her civic work and leadership including: YWCA Champion of Opportunity Award; The Network Journals 25 Influential Women in Business Award; Interdenominational Ministers' Alliance Drum Major for Social Justice Award; Nosotros Radio Latina of the Year; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's Fortitude Award; Southwest Community Health Center Leadership Award, Upstate University Hospital Community Leader Award; and the NAACP Freedom Award.

Dr. Contreras is a proud and active member of The Links, Inc. and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She was raised in Uniondale, N.Y. by her parents James and Elizabeth Contreras with her nine brothers and sisters. She has earned degrees from Binghamton University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her ever-smiling, ever-reading, robot-building great-nephew, Jonathan—whom she helps raise—is the joy of her life.

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