

Women Breaking the Bias

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Panel Bios

Dr. Darlene J. Ruscitti is the Regional Superintendent of Schools for DuPage County. She is the first woman ever elected to the position of Regional Superintendent of DuPage since the inception of the office in 1854. Darlene earned her Doctor of Education Degree from Loyola University, Chicago, in Policy Studies and Administration, and Masters and Bachelor of Education Degrees from Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago. Dr. Ruscitti has been a school board and PTO president, teacher, staff developer, administrator, and the assistant regional superintendent of schools for DuPage County. Dr. Ruscitti's experiences include appointments and nominations to a myriad of education and business committees that currently include, DuPage County Strategic Planning Initiative, DuPage Work Force Investment Board, Choose DuPage Board, DuPage Youth Council, DuPage Juvenile Justice Commission, Federation of Human Services Board, DePaul University Education Board, University of Illinois Chicago's CASEL Board (The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning), Board of Directors for the Abraham Lincoln Center for Character Development, Three Fires Council Boy Scout Troop Executive Board, United Way Honorary Board Member, Congressional Conference on Civic Education, Illinois Standards and Accountability Committee, Illinois Task Force on Education Accountability, DuPage1 Initiative, Issues Advocacy Forum, 18th Judicial Circuit Family Violence Council, and the DuPage Area Project, to name a few.

Sara Sadat is the first elected Muslim trustee to the Village of Lisle board. She is a domestic abuse advocate having fought for her three children from a decade long abusive relationship. Resident of Lisle for 12 years, she is married to her best friend who continues to strengthen and empower her every endeavor. Graduate of Computer Science, she has built her career leading projects and building nationwide portfolios on time and on budget in not-for-profit and higher education spaces. She is an established local artist and an active community-oriented parent who mentors and promotes arts and education with at-risk youth. She continues to bring Lisle's best and brightest together to revitalize our connectivity throughout the arboretum village, commercial areas and uplift the corporate footprint. Her community work as a board member with Unity Partnership, Partners of Parks, Studio360 and involvement in schools and afterschool programs demonstrate that she lives by core values of family friendliness and community first. She is looking forward to empowering our underrepresented communities by policy making and community outreach to help our families become the best version of themselves – all things we know and love, the ultimate American Dream.

Sharmin Shahjahan spent years building coalitions across religious, racial, and generational groups. When elected, Ms. Shahjahan became one of the first Bangladeshi American women elected in the United States. Most recently, she completed her tenure on Hanover Park's Village Board as its first immigrant, first Muslim, and first Asian American Councilmember. She partnered with DuPage Habitat to revitalize Hanover Park's neighborhoods and increase access to resources for Hanover Park's most vulnerable residents. During her tenure, she launched "Demographics & Policy Series" relying on census data and demographers to help policymakers and community leaders create relevant and inclusive policy and programming. Sharmin served on National League of Cities' committees advocating for municipal racial healing, immigration reform, access to childcare, and workforce development. Additionally, she drafted and introduced Hanover Park's Equity and Inclusion Ordinance, portions of which became state law in August 2021. In 2020, Sharmin co-hosted International Women's Day celebrating 100 years of women's right to vote by bringing together young girls and community

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leaders. She also organized town halls with NAACP, police, elected officials and schools resulting in several actions taken to increase trust and transparency between institutions and the community.

Erica Bray-Parker (Moderator) earned her Social Studies Education degree from Illinois State University and is currently in her 27th year of teaching at the high school level. She continued her education as a James Madison Fellow and earned her master's degree in Political Science through Northern Illinois University. Her passion for civics is infused into her classroom as she often partners with the League of Women Voters-Wheaton, local, state and federal elected officials, and campaigns on both sides of the aisle to engage and activate her students. In 2019 Erica was elected to the Wheaton City Council. Through her role as Councilwoman, At-Large, she works hard to engage local organizations, leaders and young people throughout Wheaton and on several occasions has partnered with the Wheaton Public Library on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programming. Among her many professional responsibilities she serves on the Board of Directors of the Illinois Education Association and is an advocate for strong public schools for all students. Erica looks forward to continuing to use her roles as a professional educator and local elected official to give community members a voice in local policy making.