

Dr. Shari Camhi: Leading the Way to Equitable Education in a Diverse Learning Community

Emily Bascelli

Molloy College

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The role of a school district's superintendent is to be the principal executive officer and to enforce all requirements of the law along with the rules and regulations regarding the organization of all related educational activities under the direction of the district's board of education (Merrins, 2010). It is imperative to note the distinction between a good leader and a social justice leader. A superintendent can be a good leader, but not a social justice leader. (Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis argues social justice leadership goes beyond good leadership. As seen in the Distinctions Between a Good Leader and a Social Justice Leader, Theoharis asserts a good leader, "empowers staff and works collaboratively," in contrast to a social justice leader who, "demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses problems of how to achieve that success."

Innovation, inclusivity, and involvement is active and visible throughout the Baldwin community as a result of Dr. Camhi's education initiatives. Utilizing her background on integrated technology, Dr. Camhi outlined a goal for the district's communication technology "to more widely publicize and market all that is happening in the Baldwin schools and position Baldwin as a recognized model for teaching and learning" ("New Communications and Educational Initiatives," 2016, p. 1). "Messaging is consistent, positive, and visionary. It sets the direction for everyone in the system, including parents and community" (S. Camhi, personal communication, February 19, 2019). The first step involved in this change was a new, interactive district website to showcase the innovative work students were involved in throughout the district. Baldwin UFSD collaborated with Skykit, a digital signage content management system (CMS), to allow different users to communicate consistent messages to the entire school

community (Skykit, 2019). This work is instrumental to ensure both relevance and relationships remain core principles of the district. As a result of her innovative work, Dr. Camhi was awarded the 2016 Superintendents to Watch Award from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) as one of the twenty-five new superintendents nationally who use communication technology in innovative and effective ways.

A social justice leader, “strengthens core teaching and curriculum and ensures that diverse students have access to that core” (Theoharis, 2017, p. 252). “While we can't predict the future, we can anticipate the needs, in terms of skill, that students will have. It is our obligation to prepare them for that future” (S. Camhi, personal communication, February 19, 2019). In order to best prepare Baldwin students for the future, Dr. Camhi partnered with Workspace Interiors by Office Depot to create “pedagogically responsive, progressive learning environments” (Workspace Interiors by Office Depot, 2018). As a result, the district has seen improvement in student interest and learning outcomes and has become a model of what learning should look like for schools across the country (Workspace Interiors by Office Depot, 2018).

“Outside collaborations make learning meaningful, provide additional experiences, and offer another dimension to the learning” (S. Camhi, personal communication, February 19, 2019). Dr. Camhi has collaborated with local colleges to give students an opportunity to take credit-bearing courses. In an effort to increase diversity within the ranks of teaching, Baldwin students beginning in ninth-grade and who work their way through twelfth-grade will officially be able to enter Molloy as sophomores in the teacher-preparation program (Camhi, 2018). An additional college partnership was created with Suffolk County Community College (SCCC). This program sets itself apart from other Long Island school districts’ early-college offerings because students take their classes on the actual SCCC campus.

In her work since appointed Superintendent of Baldwin Schools, Dr. Camhi continued to expand Baldwin High School's Academic Academies. These Academic Academies provide students with school-to-career partnerships by taking career-oriented electives in addition to completing regular their academic classes. Baldwin High School is the only high school to offer a four-year Academic Academy program for students in grades 9-12 (Academic Academies at Baldwin High School, n.d.). One of the most notable partnerships is with Molloy College in the creation of the New Media Academy. Baldwin High School students work with Molloy students and faculty in collaboration to experiment with new media technologies. "Learning needs to be exploratory, self-directed, meaningful, and fun" (S. Camhi, personal communication, February 19, 2019). The success of the Academic Academies in Baldwin is evidence of the work Dr. Camhi continues to pursue in effort to create and sustain equitable learning opportunities for all students to be college and career ready.

Dr. Shari Camhi embodies the distinctions of a social justice leader as characterized by Theoharis (2007). As a district leader, state leader, and national leader in the field of education, Dr. Camhi continues to work to provide equitable education opportunities for all learners.

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