



### **Dr. Sharon Contreras**

Dr. Sharon L. Contreras is passionate about providing high-quality education to each child with the goal that every student graduates college and career ready.

Sharon L. Contreras is a teacher at heart, a transformational leader and a passionate advocate for children and education. Growing up in Uniondale, New York with nine brothers and sisters, she learned early to advocate for her right to an excellent education. At the age of 10 she was told by her teacher she didn't belong in the new advanced gifted program that she knew included classmates she had tutored. After pleading her case independently, then alongside her parents, she gained a seat in the accelerated program which changed the trajectory of her life, while lighting a fire for achievement and advocacy of others.

Years later, not even the gradual loss of 90% of her hearing stopped her from breaking through barriers for herself and removing them for her students. Over the course of her 30-year education career, she has held two superintendencies – one urban and one in a county-wide district serving urban, suburban and rural students. As superintendent of Syracuse City School District, she became the first woman of color to lead one of New York's "Big 5" urban school systems and is the first woman of color, first Latina and first person with a disability to lead Guilford County Schools in North Carolina, one of the nation's largest school districts, with 126 schools, 10,000 employees and 72,000 students.

A true warrior for equity, Contreras is celebrated for implementing policies aimed at closing achievement gaps and improving opportunity for students of color. Since taking the lead in Guilford County, she's helped close the graduation rate gap between black and white students from 12.6% to 5.7% for the 2018-19 school year. While in Syracuse Contreras took on reducing the school-to-prison pipeline and tackled the disproportionate impact these policies have on students of color, successfully cutting suspensions in half over a five-year span.

Contreras was named Superintendent of the Year by the North Carolina PTA (2019), a North Carolina Regional Superintendent of the Year (2020) by the Piedmont Triad Educational Consortium and a Top 5 Finalist for the Green Garner Urban Education Leadership Award by the Council of the Great City Schools (2020). Sharon holds multiple degrees including: a Doctor

of Philosophy, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis and a Master of Science, Educational Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison; a Master of Arts, English Literature; a Master of Arts in Teaching, English Education and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the State University of New York at Binghamton.