On October 14 and 15, the STEM and Math Equity Conferences were held for the fourth consecutive year as over 500 educators and attendees from throughout the state and beyond joined together to advance the mission of cultivating and promoting more equitable climates of learning in the spaces of science, technology, engineering, and math education.

The magnitude, ambition, and success of the conferences were a result of the collaboration of many of the state’s biggest advocates for STEM equity, including the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE), the Delaware STEM Council, the Delaware Foundation for Science and Mathematics Education (DFSME), the Delaware Math Coalition (DMC), the Delaware Council of Mathematics Leaders, and the Forum to Advance Minorities in Engineering (FAME).

The conferences would also have not been possible without the continued support of both recurring and new sponsors, including Labware, DuPont, Croda, Mount Aire, Ashland, The Math Learning Center, Delmarva Power, Verizon, Bloom Energy, Heinemann, the Delaware Afterschool Network (DEAN), ACS Delaware, Science is Fun, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Amplify.

Delaware Secretary of Education Dr. Mark Holodick began the first day of conferences by setting the tone for the two-day Equity Summit.

“These conferences provide an opportunity for us to come together around a single focus,” Dr. Holodick said. “We have to ensure that what we put in front of our children positions them for success within and beyond our schools, and that every student has access to high quality curricular materials and high quality instruction.”

October 14: Delaware Math Equity Conference

Dr. Holodick also introduced keynote speaker Dr. Tanji Reed Marshall. Serving as the Director of P-12 Practice at The Education Trust and a Principal Consultant of Liaison Educational Partners, LLC, Dr. Marshall is a national-level speaker and agent of change in education whose work centers around addressing complex issues of educational equity.

“If you don’t know that equity is everywhere and equity is everything, the mere fact that I am being translated to ensure that folks that are hard of hearing or deaf is an indication that equity is everywhere and equity is everything,” Marshall said, acknowledging the conference's sign...
language translators. “The mission is to empower every learner with the highest quality education through shared leadership, innovative practices, and exemplary services. Embedded in that is this notion: That equity is everywhere and equity is everything.”

Following these introductions, attendees were given the opportunity to explore a diverse selection of equity focuses from over 20 different breakout rooms led by educators, leaders, and advocates. These topics broadly ranged from “Addressing Systemic Equity Challenges” and “Promoting Equitable Teaching in the Mathematics Classroom,” to “Empowering Leaders: Supporting Access to Deeper Learning for All.”

At mid-day, Stanford University’s Dr. Jo Boaler, a professor of mathematics and published author specializing in mathematics reform and data science, joined attendees in delivering the second keynote address entitled, “Important Ideas for Equitable Mathematics Outcomes and Strategies for Leading Change.” Shortly after, Dr. Pam Seda delivered the final keynote address, “Let it Go! Why Releasing Control is an Equity Issue,” ending the day on a strong note. As a thirty-year veteran of mathematics education and founder of Seda Educational Consulting LLC, Dr. Seda’s closing messaging sought to disrupt conventional pedagogical frameworks that emphasized control and, in doing so, empower students with positive mathematics learning experiences.

“With all these expectations that are placed on teachers, it’s very tempting to try to control every aspect of the learning process,” Dr. Seda said. “Who really controls the learning? And, if we think about it, where does learning take place? It takes place inside the heads of our children; that’s where learning happens. So, can we really control the learning? I don’t think so, I think our students are the ones that ‘drive that truck.’”

**October 15: Delaware STEM Equity Conference**

The STEM Equity Conference, which took place the following day, offered a continuation of the critical equity dialogue through five unique panel discussions consisting of STEM leaders from all spaces, from DDOE, K-12, and higher education institutions, to the business and community side, including voices from DuPont, Ashland, DEAN, and FAME.

Alongside Delaware STEM Council Executive Director Daniel Suchenski, Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long, a longtime supporter of the equity conferences, welcomed attendees and encouraged them in the importance of the work in which they engage with throughout the conferences.

“Everybody here understands that whether it’s K-12, higher education, or workforce redevelopment, that we have to get it right with equity,” Hall-Long said. “I want you to just
A series of virtual clips from STEM leaders from across the country also set the tone for the day, including greetings from Bruce Alberts, a prominent biochemist and National Medal of Science recipient; Freeman Hrabowski III, President Emeritus of the University of Maryland Baltimore County; and Bassam Shakhashiri, an educator and chemist, former ACS president, and founder of Science is Fun.

“Our role in the classroom and in the community is to engage everyone, to be inclusive, to be inviting. To enjoy the beautiful chemical world that we live in and to help protect our planet,” Shakhashiri “We must do this for the common good.”

Addressing “What STEM Equity Success Looks Like”, panel leaders included Jon Wichert and Tonyea Mead (DDOE), Tina Mitchell (DSU), Milton Muldrow (WilmU), Andrea Gardner (Discovery Ed), and Matt Krehbiel (OpenSciEd). In the afternoon, Business and Community STEM Educators addressed “Beyond the Curriculum, What’s it Going to Take to Promote Student Success in STEM?” with panel leaders including Carolmarie Brown (Ashland), Alexa Dembek (DuPont), Regina Sidney-Brown (DEAN) and Don Baker (FAME).

The conferences ultimately concluded with closing remarks by DDOE’s Dr. Cora Scott, “Challenging Ourselves to Take the Next Bold Step.”

For the full day’s events of the Oct. 14 Math Equity Conference and bios of speakers, click here.

To access the October 15 STEM Equity Agenda with live links to a video of the conference and to the videos and bios of our drop-in speakers, click here.

Jan Castro is a writer, University of Delaware alum, and native Delawarean who has been a proud student of Delaware educators.