

Delran High School students learn from local women leaders

By [Lisa Ryan](#)

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Fifty-four female students at Delran High School attended a workshop to encourage young women to get involved in politics, whether by voting, speaking up, or running for office.

DELRAN — The percentage of women in the Delran High School library was roughly 99 percent, far higher than the percentages of women in government.

Although women make up 51 percent of the voting population, they represent only 15 percent of American government officials, guest speaker Debbie Walsh said.

“We really look to you now as the great hope,” she told the assembled 54 young women last week. “... Keep signing petitions, keep marching, keep getting out there and staying engaged because we need you now more than ever.”

Walsh, the director of [Rutgers University’s Center for American Women and Politics](#), addressed the young women as the keynote speaker for “Running and Winning,” an event co-sponsored by six organizations and held by the county’s [League of Women Voters chapter](#).

Running and Winning aims to help ninth- through twelfth-grade girls learn about leadership and civic involvement straight from the source — women in local office.

Such local officials as school board members, mayors, and councilwomen from Moorestown, Chesterfield and Delran, and [Deputy Director Linda Hughes](#) of the Burlington County [Board of Chosen Freeholders](#) fielded students’ questions in quick Q and As.

If one walked around the room, they would catch snippets of conversations on confidence in one’s decision-making, the rewards that come from hard work in public office, and using the interpersonal communication women are expected to excel in to relate to one’s constituents.

Much of the morning’s conversation, from the keynote speech to some of the table sessions, dealt with the role perspective plays in politics, with diversity in politics giving voice to underrepresented views.

“The thing that’s really important to us is women having a voice,” Hughes said. “And neither ([Freeholder Director Kate Gibbs](#)) or I got where we are because we’re women, it’s because we worked hard.”

Learning from these visitors’ experiences helped the Delran students’ work toward their own goals. For junior Rose Lloyd, who is currently volunteering on [Andy Kim](#)’s Congressional campaign and helped organize an anti-gun violence walkout in March, the day tied into her long-time passion for politics.

“I’ve always loved watching the news and women having a seat at the table,” she said.

Rose hoped to learn during the breakout sessions how to get involved in civic leadership after high school. Others were interested more in leadership in general than in politics.

Student Mackaenna Laylor was most looking forward to a later phase of the day, in which the young women took on different roles on a mock campaign team, preparing and then presenting a platform to their peers.

Marcy Rosner, of the League of Women Voters, said that exercise requires students to lead and to follow the lead of others, and gives them an opportunity to use strengths in writing to nail a speech, or in art to design an informative poster on a candidate's platform.

"A lot of them say, 'I didn't know I could do this, I didn't know I could make such a difference,'" she said. "It really impacts them."

Christine DeSimone, school social studies supervisor, said the opportunity to host Running and Winning would benefit her students after high school.

"Having that perspective of someone who is a model for you, who is a female, who knows what it's like to run for public office ... I think it's a wonderful opportunity for our girls to be able to see role models," she said.