

# Influential Women Highlights the Work of Shirlene A. Blake: Visionary Leader in Arts and Dance Education

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-- Championing Dance Education and  
Equitable Access in New York City Public  
Schools

Shirlene A. Blake is a visionary arts leader and educator committed to advancing dance education and ensuring equitable access to the arts for all students. As Director of Dance for the New York City Public Schools Arts Office, she leads with passion and purpose—mentoring teachers, developing innovative curricula, and partnering with cultural institutions to keep dance a vibrant and inclusive part of public education. Her leadership reflects a profound understanding of how movement, creativity, and human connection can transform learning and strengthen communities.



With more than a decade of experience in education, Shirlene's career spans the classroom and administrative leadership, consistently championing the transformative power of the arts. She has served as a dance educator, curriculum writer, mentor, and adjunct professor at both New York University and the New World School of the Arts. Beyond teaching technique, she approaches dance as a lens for understanding humanity—fostering self-expression, cultural awareness, and resilience in every student she guides.

"I believe that dance and the arts should stand at the heart of education," said Shirlene. "It is crucial to create spaces where all students can thrive, move, and find their voice."

Currently pursuing her Doctorate in Dance Education at Teachers College, Columbia University,

Shirlene is committed to equity-centered leadership and interdisciplinary collaboration. Her dedication to these principles was recently recognized with the prestigious 2025 Outstanding Leadership in K–12 Dance Education Award from the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO). This honor underscores her impactful contribution to the field and her ability to inspire educators and students alike.

Shirlene attributes her professional success to both her own drive and the network of mentors, colleagues, friends, family, and former students who have guided, supported, and challenged her along the way. She emphasizes that none of her accomplishments have been in isolation; each person in her journey has inspired her growth and helped shape her path. The best career advice she has received—to know yourself and never stop learning—underscores her commitment to self-awareness and continual development.

For young women entering her field, Shirlene encourages curiosity, persistence, and surrounding oneself with supportive yet challenging influences. She advises embracing one's voice, taking up space, and maintaining integrity, which she views as essential to navigating both career and life successfully.

In today's fast-paced world, Shirlene sees a unique opportunity to reimagine the nurturing of artists and educators, building communities grounded in mentorship, support, and care. Guided by values of honesty, authenticity, and hard work, she balances her professional dedication with meaningful time spent with family, friends, and the circles that keep her grounded.

As she continues her journey, Shirlene A. Blake remains a beacon of inspiration and a driving force for equity in dance education, ensuring that the transformative power of the arts is accessible to every student in New York City's public schools.

Learn More about Shirlene A. Blake:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/shirlene-blake>

Influential Women

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