

Influential Women Showcase Mary Natoli: Transformative Educational Leader With More Than 36 Years Of Service

WEST HEMPSTEAD, NY, UNITED STATES, August 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Former Principal Built a Legacy of Equity, Innovation, and Student Success Through Decades of Dedicated Leadership in Education

West Hempstead, New York — Mary Natoli is a distinguished educational leader whose more than 36-year career has been defined by innovation, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to student achievement. Through roles as a classroom teacher, instructional leader, assistant principal, and principal, Mary has dedicated her professional life to creating equitable learning environments, empowering educators, and helping students reach their full potential.



Mary's path into education began unexpectedly after completing two years at Fordham Law School. When she became pregnant, she made the decision to step away from law school and pursue a career in teaching. Inspired by her immigrant parents, who deeply valued education despite having only a fourth- and eighth-grade education themselves, Mary recognized the transformative power of learning and felt called to make a difference in the lives of children.

She began her teaching career at a Title I school located just two miles from her home, serving a community where 99% of students qualified for free lunch. The experience became the foundation for her lifelong dedication to equity, access, and opportunity. Working with students from diverse backgrounds, many facing significant challenges, strengthened her belief that every child deserves support, encouragement, and the opportunity to succeed.

During her five years as a classroom teacher, Mary developed innovative instructional strategies that focused on meeting the needs of individual learners. At a time when large classrooms often consisted of 36 students, she implemented small group instruction models designed to provide more personalized support. These approaches, considered innovative in the 1980s, are now widely recognized as effective educational practices.

Her impact in the classroom earned her recognition as a recipient of an America's Choice grant, through which she developed model reading classrooms and helped secure more than one million dollars in funding to support instructional improvement. Her ability to influence student achievement beyond her own classroom led her into instructional leadership, where she served as a math facilitator before earning her Master's Degree in Administration.

Mary quickly advanced into school administration, becoming an assistant principal and serving for a decade in a school placed on the state restructuring list. During her tenure, she played a key role in implementing improvement strategies, strengthening instruction, supporting teachers, and helping guide the school through a successful turnaround that resulted in its removal from the designation.

Her greatest leadership chapter came as Principal of Covert Avenue School in the Elmont Union Free School District, where she served for 13 years. When Mary arrived, the school community faced low morale and division, but she approached leadership through collaboration, trust-building, and a shared commitment to improvement. By fostering strong relationships among staff, families, and community members, she created a culture centered on teamwork and student success.

Under Mary's leadership, Covert Avenue School experienced a remarkable transformation, rising from the lowest-performing elementary school in the district to the highest-performing. Serving a diverse student population that included many multilingual learners and children from immigrant families, Mary focused on creating inclusive educational opportunities while supporting teachers with the tools and resources needed to succeed.

During this period of professional growth and achievement, Mary also earned her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership, further expanding her understanding of effective leadership, organizational development, and educational change. She retired as principal at age 59 after 36 and a half years of service, leaving behind a legacy of meaningful transformation and lasting impact.

Mary attributes her success to persistence and perseverance. She believes that her ability to continue moving forward despite obstacles has been one of the defining characteristics of her career. As a gifted child with a very high IQ, Mary excelled academically from an early age and, while in eighth grade, participated in weekend programs at Brooklyn Law School involving mock trials and related activities. Because education came naturally to her, she developed a passion for helping students who needed additional support and encouragement to discover their own

abilities.

One of the most influential pieces of advice Mary received came early in her teaching career when she was eight months pregnant with her second child. Her assistant principal encouraged her not to allow others to dictate her path and reminded her to use her strengths and abilities to the fullest. Managing a classroom of 36 students while balancing personal responsibilities, Mary learned the importance of confidence, leadership, and recognizing the unique strengths each person brings to the table.

For young women entering education, Mary emphasizes resilience, self-belief, and authenticity. She encourages future leaders not to allow another person's opinion to define their potential. Instead, she believes individuals should create their own definition of success through their actions, values, and dedication to those they serve. She also believes that effective leaders must treat every member of a school community with respect, including teachers, administrators, custodians, aides, and transportation staff.

Reflecting on the challenges facing education today, Mary recognizes the complexities of leadership, including administrative pressures, political differences, budgeting concerns, resource limitations, and changing expectations. However, she believes the foundation of education must remain focused on the human element—supporting students, empowering educators, and preparing young people for success in life and the workplace.

Throughout her personal and professional journey, Mary has remained guided by three core values: consistency, loyalty, and honesty. She believes these principles are essential for building trust, maintaining meaningful relationships, and creating lasting positive change.

Outside of education, Mary enjoys playing golf, traveling, and spending quality time with her family. These interests reflect her appreciation for balance, connection, and lifelong fulfillment.

Through her decades of service and leadership, Mary Natoli continues to represent the power of education to transform lives and communities.

Learn More about Mary Natoli:

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

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