# Influential Women Features Autumn Thomas: Bilingual Counselor And Educational Leader

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, September 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Advancing College and Career Readiness, Student Development, and Educational Equity Through Service, Cultural Responsiveness, and a Commitment to Seeing the Whole Person



Washington, D.C. — Autumn Thomas is a bilingual counselor and educational leader serving as the Director of College and Career Readiness at YouthBuild DC Public Charter School. Deeply committed to advancing equity, access, and opportunity for students from underserved and underrepresented communities, Autumn has built a career focused on helping young people recognize their potential and develop the tools they need to pursue meaningful futures.

Recognized as an educator, mentor, and changemaker, Autumn brings a student-centered and culturally responsive approach to her work. Her professional mission is rooted in service and driven by the conviction to be the change she wishes to see in the world. Across more than 12 years in education and youth development, she has worked with students and families in a variety of environments, from college campuses and underserved elementary schools to international classrooms and juvenile detention settings.

Through each experience, Autumn has developed a consistent philosophy: understanding people requires looking beyond the surface. She believes educators and advocates must seek to understand a person's background, lived experiences, challenges, and strengths before they can effectively support that individual's growth.

A Foundation Built on Education and Service

Autumn's journey in education began more than 12 years ago when she was just 20 years old

and attending Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. During the summers, she worked as a camp counselor, gaining early experience working directly with young people. During the academic year, she served as a Resident Assistant, a role that became an important foundation for her leadership and student-development work.

As an RA, Autumn went beyond the traditional responsibilities of residential life. She designed and facilitated programming intended to support students holistically, including spoken word poetry events, wellness and sexual health education workshops, and personal development sessions centered on identity, purpose, and self-discovery.

Those early experiences helped Autumn recognize the different circumstances students bring with them into educational environments. While she grew up in a family that consistently affirmed and supported her, serving as an RA exposed her to students from a wide range of backgrounds. It was then that she began to understand that not everyone has the same foundation of encouragement and stability.

That realization became an important part of her professional philosophy. Because she had experienced affirmation herself, Autumn wanted to become someone who could provide that same sense of encouragement to others.

Following a Family Legacy of Education

Education is deeply connected to Autumn's family history. Both of her grandmothers were educators, including her grandmother Dorothy, who passed away when Autumn was very young, and her paternal grandmother. Autumn learned about her maternal grandmother's career in education through the way her mother spoke about her, making her mother's influence equally significant.

Autumn believes that her commitment to education was part of her family legacy even before she fully understood it. The examples set by the women in her family helped establish her respect for learning, service, and the ability of education to influence lives across generations.

Another significant influence during her college years was psychologist Dr. Frances Cress Welsing. Through studying Welsing's work, Autumn was inspired by her willingness to unearth difficult subjects and examine issues at their core.

That influence encouraged Autumn to continually ask why: Why do people believe certain things? Why do they behave in certain ways? Why do systems operate as they do?

For Autumn, understanding the "why" has become more than an intellectual exercise. It is a practical approach to working with students and communities. By looking beneath surface-level behavior, she believes educators can better understand what students need to succeed.

Expanding Her Perspective Through Service and International Education

Following graduation, Autumn joined AmeriCorps in Washington, D.C., where she supported fifth-grade students in underserved schools. Her work focused on improving literacy and mathematics outcomes while giving her a deeper understanding of systemic inequities within education.

Her career later expanded internationally when she moved to Colombia, South America, to teach. At the time, Autumn did not speak Spanish, but she immersed herself in the culture and ultimately became fluent. She went on to serve as a college-level English professor, teaching students at introductory through advanced levels.

The experience strengthened her adaptability and cultural competence while giving her a broader perspective on education and communication. Moving to another country without knowing the language required Autumn to confront uncertainty directly, an experience that would later influence the advice she gives to young women: do it scared.

Autumn's willingness to step outside her comfort zone has remained a defining characteristic of her career.

Seeing the Person Beyond the Behavior

After returning to the United States, Autumn served as a youth and student advocate in a juvenile detention center. Initially uncertain about what she would experience, she ultimately found the role to be one of the most impactful experiences of her professional life.

Working with incarcerated students reinforced her belief that people should not be defined solely by their behavior or circumstances. Instead, effective education requires seeing the whole person, including their background, lived experiences, challenges, and potential.

Autumn learned that it is possible to love and support people without excusing harmful actions. That distinction allows her to approach students with both compassion and accountability.

She believes every student deserves the opportunity to start from a place of possibility, with the understanding that people can learn, grow, change, and make different choices.

Supporting Families and Building Stronger Communities

Autumn later led a family success program in Washington, D.C., working closely with families in underserved communities. She helped develop individualized support plans addressing employment, housing stability, education, and mental health needs.

Her work extended beyond individual support plans through community-centered initiatives such as Parent Cafés. These programs created safe and supportive spaces where families could connect, share experiences, and build resilience together.

The experience strengthened Autumn's understanding that student success cannot be separated

from the environments in which young people live. When families receive support and resources, students can be better positioned to engage in education and pursue their goals.

Leading College and Career Readiness
Today, Autumn serves as Director of College and Career Readiness and School Culture at YouthBuild DC Public Charter School, where she supports students in post-secondary planning, college and career readiness, and school culture development.

Her leadership responsibilities also include helping foster a culture centered on responsibility, integrity, and respect. Although overseeing both college and career readiness and school culture represents responsibilities she had not previously managed, Autumn approached the opportunity with the same willingness to move forward despite uncertainty that has characterized her career.

For Autumn, the goal is not simply to prepare students for the next academic or professional step. It is to help them understand themselves, recognize their strengths, and develop the confidence to make purposeful decisions about their futures.

“Do It Scared”
Autumn’s message to young women entering her field is simple: do it scared.

Every meaningful step in her own career has involved some level of fear. Rather than viewing fear as a reason to stop, she has learned to see it as a possible indication that she is moving toward growth.

From working in juvenile detention to moving abroad without knowing Spanish and stepping into a director-level position with new responsibilities, Autumn has repeatedly accepted opportunities before she felt completely prepared.

She encourages young women to believe in themselves and understand that being afraid does not mean they are incapable. Sometimes, growth and success are waiting on the other side of that fear.

Creating Environments Where Students Feel Seen
One of the biggest challenges and opportunities Autumn sees in education is the wide range of emotional, social, and environmental support students bring into learning spaces.

Because Autumn experienced consistent affirmation while growing up, she understands how powerful that foundation can be. At the same time, her experiences as a Resident Assistant and throughout her career have shown her that many students do not have the same level of stability or encouragement.

This reality has strengthened her commitment to creating environments where students feel

seen, supported, and valued. Autumn believes educators have an opportunity to intentionally provide the encouragement and consistency that can help students build confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of self.

Her approach is grounded in the belief that understanding a student requires more than looking at grades or behavior. It requires understanding the person behind them.

Leading With Spirituality, Integrity, and Humility
Spirituality, integrity, and humility are among the values that guide Autumn in both her professional and personal life.

For Autumn, spirituality does not necessarily have to take a specific religious form. She believes people should be grounded spiritually and guided by their inner sense of what feels right. When something does not feel right, she asks questions. When something feels right, she remains open to continuing down that path.

Integrity is equally important. Throughout every role she has held, Autumn has wanted to do things the right way and remain true to who she is. That commitment is connected to her broader message about courage: even when someone is scared, they still have to be willing to stand in who they are and move forward.

Humility keeps Autumn growing. She believes that as long as she knows there is another level to reach and understands that she does not have all the answers, she can remain hungry to learn.

An Author, Lifelong Learner, and Mentor
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Autumn's passion for learning extends beyond her professional responsibilities. She is a published author of What I Wish I Knew, a memoir and self-help book that draws from her lived experiences to offer reflection, encouragement, and practical lessons for navigating challenges with greater confidence, clarity, and self-awareness.

Her love of reading helped inspire her to write her own book. She also continues to pursue new areas of learning, including improving her Spanish, teaching others introductory-level Spanish, and she is beginning to learn Portuguese.

Autumn enjoys finding challenges outside of education as well. She does hair on the side and, when someone requests a style she has never done before, she enjoys watching YouTube videos, conducting research, practicing, and working until she can do it well.

Born and raised in Florida, Autumn has lived in the Washington, D.C., area for the past nine years. She enjoys going to the gym, traveling, and spending time with family and friends. Her family is spread across Florida, Georgia, Ohio, and North Carolina, giving her plenty of reasons to

travel and stay connected.

She also has a 9-pound Chihuahua whom she affectionately considers her son.

As Autumn continues to develop as an educational leader, counselor, author, and advocate, her work remains grounded in the same principles that have guided her from the beginning: understand the why, see the whole person, lead with empathy and integrity, and never allow fear to prevent growth.

Her career demonstrates the power of education not only to change individual lives, but also to create stronger communities and expand opportunities for those who have historically faced barriers. Through her commitment to students, families, and lifelong learning, Autumn continues to embody her professional mission to be the change she wishes to see in the world.

Learn More about Autumn Thomas:

Through her Influential Women profile: https://influentialwomen.com/connect/Autumn-Thomas

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