
CURRICULUM VITAE

Dr. Brenda Ortiz McGrath

Ed.D., MSW

Educational Leader · District Administrator · Consultant · Author ·
Researcher

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Dr. Brenda Ortiz McGrath, Ed.D., MSW is an educational leader, district administrator, consultant, author, and researcher who strengthens PK-12 systems — leadership, policy, social-emotional learning, student support, and family and community engagement — so that every student has a real path to success.

She currently serves as a PK-12 District Administrator for Chelsea Public Schools, leading social work, social-emotional learning, school mental health, grant development and management, data and continuous improvement, staff supervision, and community partnerships districtwide. She previously served as Principal of Waltham High School — the first Latina and first woman to lead the school in 53 years — and as the district's first Latina administrator.

She is the creator of the MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™, a culturally grounded model designed to strengthen the identity, voice, and leadership of Latina women, and the creator of CoreKind360 Family Connect. She is an elected Lynn School Committee Member At-Large, chairing both the DEI and Policy subcommittees.

Mission

People first, always

People do their best work when they are known, valued, challenged, supported, and given meaningful opportunities to lead. Every system she builds starts there.

Systems that outlast a single leader

Programs come and go. Her work is building the structures, staffing, funding, and data practices that keep good practice in place long after a launch year.

Culture as strength, not an add-on

Language, heritage, and lived experience belong at the center of leadership — for students, families, and the leaders who serve them.

Creating what should already exist

When a pathway is missing for students, families, or emerging leaders, she builds it — through district systems, the MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™, and CoreKind360 Family Connect.

Professional Experience

District Administrator, PK-12

2022–Present

Chelsea Public Schools

Leads districtwide strategy across an 11-school PK-12 system serving approximately 6,300 students, aligning academic, attendance, behavioral, SEL/MTSS, family-engagement, and specialized-support priorities. Leads and develops professional teams through PLC structures and data-informed routines, advises central office leaders, principals, and school teams on crisis response and compliance, and directs grants, vendor and community partnerships with families, public agencies, healthcare and crisis providers, and regional organizations.

Principal

2021–Aug 2022

Waltham High School

First Latina and first woman to lead the school in 53 years. Directed schoolwide instructional strategy, operations, culture, and student-success priorities through an improvement plan centered on academic growth and belonging; led the Instructional Leadership Team in developing the Quality School Plan; supervised and evaluated faculty and school-based teams; and expanded family partnership through the PTO, School Site Council, home visits, adult education, and the Latinx Parent Leadership Group.

Associate Principal

2017–2021

Waltham Public Schools

The district's first Latina administrator. Led high school house operations, student-success systems, school climate, and discipline, advancing the School Improvement Plan with department leaders. Provided staff supervision, coaching, and professional learning, and introduced and scaled restorative practices as a schoolwide approach to belonging, accountability, and culture.

Head of Family & Community Engagement / Dean of Students

2014–2017

Bentley Academy, Salem

A founding member of the school's turnaround work, partnering with families, staff, and community organizations as the school achieved Level 1 status.

School Adjustment Counselor

2006–2014

Waltham Public Schools

Eight years of direct practice with students and families — supporting transitions, emotional well-being, peer relationships, and academic stress, and connecting families to community resources.

Education

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Educational Leadership & Supervision

American International College — 2026, GPA 4.0

Master of Social Work (MSW)

Boston College — 2006, clinical and school social work practice

Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)

Wheelock College

Educational Leadership

University of New England — 2017–2018

Massachusetts Licensure

Superintendent (Professional); Principal K-12; School Adjustment Counselor; Director of Pupil Personnel; Director of

School Counseling; Attendance / Truancy Supervisor

Additional Training

Essential Elements of School Threat Assessment (On Demand)

Completed September 22, 2026 · 1.0 contact hour (online training).

Title IX Investigator

External certification training in Title IX investigation and compliance.

Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI)

Trained facilitator in de-escalation and crisis prevention practice.

Restorative & Mediation Practice

Training in restorative approaches, mediation, and conflict resolution programming.

Doctoral Research

Reducing Dropout Rates Through Social-Emotional Learning in Urban Public Schools: A Qualitative Document Analysis

A qualitative document analysis exploring how social-emotional learning can support efforts to reduce dropout rates in urban public schools. Available through ProQuest (proquest.com/docview/3388192853).

Fellowships

- CASEL SEL Lead Fellow · 2025–2026 cohort
- LeadBoston Scholarship Recipient, YW Boston · 2024–2025
- Aspiring Latino Leaders Fellow, Latinos for Education · 2023–2024
- Influence 100 Fellow · Cohort 2 · 2020–2021

Public Service

- Lynn School Committee Member, At-Large — Elected citywide to help set policy, budget priorities, and direction for the district's students and families.
- Chair, DEI Subcommittee — Leading the subcommittee's work on access, inclusion, and equitable outcomes across schools.
- Chair, Policy Subcommittee — Guiding policy review and development so district practice is clear, current, and consistent.

Boards & Appointments

- Elected School Committee Member, Policy Chair & DEI Chair — Lynn School Committee (Current)
- Vice President, Lynn Hispanic Scholarship Fund (Current)
- Commissioner, Essex County Commission for the Status of Women (2023–2026)
- Board Member, Lynn Housing Trust Fund (Current)
- National Advisory Board, Alongside (Current)
- Massachusetts Association for Mental Health Advisory Council (Current)
- Healthy Families Advisory Board (Current)
- Advisory Council, Eliot Family Resource Center (Current)

Honors & Awards

- The Catalyst Award, 20th Annual Women of ALPFA Summit (2026)
- Top 50 Educator Nationwide (2026)

- Grand Marshal, Latin American Flags Parade (2026)
- Honorary Hispanic Leader 2026, 11th Annual Lynn Celebration (2026)
- Visionary Leader Award, Influencer Magazine Awards (2025)
- Featured in Times Square, Influencer Magazine UK (2025)
- City Citation, City of Chelsea (2025)
- City Citation, City of Lynn — Hispanic Heritage Month (2024)
- Inspirational Woman Award, The Latina Center Maria (2024)
- Outstanding Professional, Latino Center Maria (Lynn, MA) (2024)
- Massachusetts Title I Distinguished Graduate (2003)

Publications & Articles

- “How Brenda Ortiz McGrath Is Rewiring Student Support in Public Education” — TomoClub · Education Hall, 2026
- “Tier 1 Is Not Basic — It Is the Backbone of Everything We Do” — The Educator's Room, 2026
- “Leading Education Through Belonging, Bold Leadership, and Whole-Child Transformation” — The Educator's Room · Top 50 Educators Feature, 2026

Selected Speaking Engagements

- bryt Symposium 2026 — Navigating Toward Hope** 2026 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Reimagining Tier 1 Student Support with a Clinician-Developed AI Resource
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary ...** 2026 · Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Using a Continuous Improvement Cycle to Create Safe, Supportive Environments
- New York University — Master of Social Work Program** 2025 · Guest Presenter
Tier 1 Mental Health Support and AI Tools in Schools
- CASEL** 2025 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
CASEL 2025 Presentation
- MASCA** 2024 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Using Tech to Support a Comprehensive Counseling Program
- CASEL SEL Exchange** 2025 & 2026 · Presenter
AI in Action: Explore Personalized SEL Through Research and Practice
- The Urban Assembly — SEL 4 All Symposium** 2025 · Presenter
Building a Comprehensive SEL Team-Based Model to Transform School Culture
- Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education** 2022 · Invited Presenter
Presented Chelsea Public Schools' districtwide approach to social-emotional learning, behavioral health, mental ...
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and ...** Multiple Engagements · Presenter & Workshop Facilitator
Facilitated workshops and presentations for Massachusetts educators and leaders on social-emotional learning, ...
- National Center for School Mental Health Annual Conference** 2024 · Presenter
Nuestra Comunidad: How One District Leverages Technology to Enhance a Community Mental Health Program
- Alongside National Panel** 2024 · Panelist
School Mental Health in the Age of AI
- edWeb Mental Health & Wellness Week** 2024 · Presenter
Wellness Strategies for All: Support In and Out of the Classroom

Contact

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