

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

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Young Women's Power Lunch: Empowering Futures Through Mentorship

SAN JOSE, Calif. (December 9, 2025): On Thursday, December 4, 2025, the Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara, hosted its 8th Young Women's Power Lunch. This more intimate lunch brought together young women from Gunderson High School, Roberto Cruz Leadership Academy, and Dr. TJ Owens Gilroy Early College Academy to connect with mentors including female judicial officers, attorneys, peace officers and local leaders. Building on the momentum and overwhelmingly positive feedback from the prior gatherings, this luncheon piloted a newer approach for the older high school students, adding activities to help prepare them for their next stage post-graduation.

Hon. Kelly Paul, the organizing leader of this event, opened the event, encouraging students to embrace their voices and trust their potential. "You do not need to wait for permission to dream big, a goal is where you put steps and a path in place," she said. "Your story, your challenges, and your passions all matter. We are here to remind you that there is room for you at every table, including this one."

Students were paired with mentors to engage in inspirational activities such as vision mapping and telling their story. Students rotated through small-group discussions, anchored by these activities as they engaged with the mentors who shared their own educational journeys, career paths, and lessons learned along the way. Mentors emphasized the importance of representation, resilience, and staying open to new opportunities.

After lunch, students participated in an interactive panel led by Judges Paul and Alloggiamento, featuring three mentors who had been seated at the tables throughout the event: Hon. Shelyna Brown (Ret.), Probation Officer Deserie Escobar, and Deputy Public Defender Cecilia Fernandez. When a student asked, "How do I stand out in a job?", Ms.

Fernandez responded, “Be yourself. You can’t do what others are doing because you are not others. You have your own unique way of speaking and showing your skills, and the right people will appreciate that.”

Towards the end of the event, a few students had the opportunity to share their goals and reflections. One student stated, “My dream is to attend UC Berkeley and study Sociology. I was really nervous when I submitted my application, but after today, I feel like I better understand the power in my work. I learned that rejection is redirection, and I shouldn’t lose sight of my dreams and goals because of it.” Another student noted, “Today was such an exciting day, and it’s an honor to be here. I’m grateful to have met incredible, inspiring women who have opened my eyes and mind to new possibilities.”

Hon. Julia Alloggiamento, Chair of the Court Community Outreach Committee, closed out the event, discussing what she hoped students take away from the program. “There is nothing more powerful than a room full of women supporting each other. Instead of feeling the need to compete with other women for a seat at the table, we all need to remember to just pull up another chair.”

The Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara, extends its sincere appreciation to all mentors, speakers, staff, and community partners who made this second Young Women’s Power Lunch possible. Special thanks are extended to the California Judges Foundation whose grant funding allowed the Court to pilot a new approach and the Office of Women’s Policy for its continued support of this growing initiative to inspire and empower the next generation of women leaders.

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Figure 3- High school student sharing her reflections and takeaways from the event.



Figure 4- Judge Alloggiamento speaking to attendees.



Figure 5- A group of students listening intently to Judge Piano's mentorship (in red blazer).



Figure 6- Hon. Shelyna Brown (Ret.), Cecilia Fernandez, and Desiree Escobar share their experiences navigating workplaces as women of color.



Figure 7- Judge Alloggiamento, Rose Luerra (Office of Women's Policy, Community Outreach Specialist), and Judge Paul pose together in front of the makeup goodie bags prepared for the students.



Figure 8- Judge Paul offering insightful advice to high school students.



Figure 9- Collaborative assignments created by students and mentors.