

# Rochester

## Education Fellowship

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Media Contact**

media@rochestereducationfellowship.org

### **Rochester Advocates for Children and Families Launch Search for Education Fellow**

*Exceptional social entrepreneurs encouraged to apply at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](https://RochesterEducationFellowship.org)*

*Selection committee members include leaders from Action for a Better Community, The IBERO American Action League, Connected Communities, Children's Institute, The Farash Foundation, Avenue BlackBox Theatre and other community partners, parents, educators and advocates*

ROCHESTER — (January 4, 2021) — A coalition of local child and family advocates today announced the [Rochester Education Fellowship](https://RochesterEducationFellowship.org), a two-year fellowship for a talented leader to co-create and build a new, community-centered vision for bold, transformational change for Rochester's public school systems.

The application for the Fellowship is now open and candidates who are entrepreneurial, have experience in executive-level leadership, deep knowledge of local needs, and an unapologetic focus on equitable outcomes for all Rochester students and families are encouraged to apply.

*"The current challenges facing marginalized students and families are deeply embedded in the design of the systems of our nation and the city of Rochester," said **Jerome Underwood, President and CEO of Action for a Better Community and Selection Committee Co-Chair.** "However, systems designed to produce inequitable outcomes can be redesigned to produce a greater quality of life for all in our community. The members of the Rochester Education Fellow Selection Committee believe there is great promise for aligned community members and leaders to reimagine Rochester's public school systems with the needs of Black, Brown, and economically marginalized families and students at the center."*

#### **Challenges Facing Students and Families in Rochester**

Students in Rochester face many obstacles to successful academic and life outcomes. Currently, 44% of students under the age of 18 in Rochester are living in poverty. Student achievement is among the lowest of any urban district in the country, with only 8% of students in grades 3-8 mastering math and reading on grade level, compared to the state average of 40% in both subjects.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the challenges of educating Rochester's most vulnerable families, with the digital divide heightening inequities. While many are working to support students in the city, the Rochester Education Fellowship Selection Committee believes transformative leadership is needed now to create a movement of bold, systemic change for Rochester students.

## **Introducing the Rochester Education Fellowship**

The Selection Committee seeks candidates who have a deep understanding of the needs of the Rochester community, experience navigating existing political systems and structures, and the ability to build momentum and a coalition for a partnership with the local community.

Interested applicants for the Rochester Education Fellowship can learn more about the application and selection process, Fellowship supports, Selection Committee members, and more at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](https://RochesterEducationFellowship.org). The priority application deadline is February 26, 2021 and submissions will be accepted until March 26, 2021. The selected Fellow will be announced in July 2021.

The Fellow will access a wide variety of support from both local and national partners, including leadership development, personalized executive coaching, and a commitment of support and collaboration from anchor Rochester organizations to ensure they and the organization they launch have a lasting impact. Learn more about the fellowship at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](https://RochesterEducationFellowship.org).

## **A Selection Committee Deeply Committed to Rochester**

The Rochester Education Fellowship Selection Committee is co-chaired by Jerome Underwood, President and CEO of Action for a Better Community (ABC) and Holli Budd, Executive Director of the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation (Farash Foundation), two organizations with a strong history of supporting the city's youth and families.

Additional Selection Committee members include:

- Angelica Perez-Delgado, The IBERO American Action League
- LaShunda Leslie-Smith, Connected Communities
- Dirk Hightower, The Children's Institute
- Mellanye Nesmith, ABC's Policy Council and local parent
- Rick DeJesus-Rueff, Community member
- Reenah Golden, Avenue Blackbox Theatre
- Dr. Rita Gaither, Retired Rochester educator, Founder Pearl Resources, Inc
- Sekou Biddle, UNCF
- David Harris, The City Fund

The Selection Committee will lead the search and selection process for the Fellow, and will also provide support during the two-year Fellowship.

## **Community Leaders and Selection Committee Members Applaud Fellowship Launch**

*“As a native Rochesterian who grew up on the eastside of the inner city, I’ve seen the devastating effects of poverty and the impact it has in Rochester,” said **LaShunda Leslie-Smith, Executive Director, Connected Communities**. “We know that poverty continues to be a real obstacle to academic success today, with 44% of students under the age of 18 in Rochester living in poverty. Our goal at Connected Communities is to break this cycle of poverty through anti-racist revitalization and equitable resource distribution, and we feel very strongly that the Rochester Education Fellowship will go a long way towards achieving our shared goal.”*

*“There are many deep and interconnected challenges in the way of providing equitable and quality education to Rochester’s children, including poverty, segregation, and high leadership turnover. There is an urgent and deep need for transformational, systemic change that is in alignment with the community,” said **Holli Budd, Executive Director of the Farash Foundation and Selection Committee Co-Chair**. “We are intensely aware of the challenges Rochester children and families face and are committed to the long lasting work needed to turn the tide.”*

*“We have seen firsthand through our work in education with city students the need for a bold initiative of this size,” said **Angelica Perez-Delgado, President and CEO of Ibero-American Action League**. “The Rochester Education Fellowship will provide a more even playing field for all of Rochester’s families, and Ibero is proud to be a member of this committee.”*

*“At the Children’s Institute, we emphasize support for the whole child. Social and emotional wellbeing provides a foundation for all human development and learning.” said **Ann Marie White, Ed.D., Executive Director of the Children’s Institute**. “We are committed to ensuring high quality classrooms and schools for children’s learning, and value helping to select a Rochester Education Fellow to aid in this paramount goal.”*

*“Many in Rochester have worked for decades to prioritize support for the whole child and equipping and supporting those who work with children. Similarly, many of us from the child serving community see social and emotional health as foundational for emerging cognitive abilities as well as language and overall human development,” said **A. Dirk Hightower, Ph.D., Senior Associate, Children’s Institute**. “I believe that via the Rochester Education Fellowship, a leader will be identified who will help build and sustain a healthy, aligned education ecosystem with a relentless pursuit of ensuring every child in Rochester has access to high-quality educational experiences. As a member of the Selection Committee, I will work tirelessly in helping to identify such a change agent.”*

*“I was born and raised in Rochester and know the struggles children here face. I couldn’t be a bigger believer in the importance of ensuring all children have equitable access to a well-rounded education that includes the arts, culture and social justice,” said **Reenah Golden, Founder, Avenue Blackbox Theatre**. “I am proud to serve on the Selection Committee with these established local leaders as we work together to push the needle forward creating opportunities for Rochester’s youth.”*

*“I share the belief that it is critically important that all children have access to a high-quality education. I recognize that children in Rochester face many barriers to this - especially as Covid has only amplified the challenges and heightened the inequalities impacting marginalized communities,” said Rick DeJesus-Rueff, Ed.D., Academic Director, First Generation Scholars Program at St. John Fisher College and longtime Rochester resident. “I am confident this Fellowship will bring in support from all over the city in pursuit of our shared goal of addressing these longstanding inequities and identifying ways to deliver excellent education for students in Rochester. I am honored to be invited to join with others in pursuit of this urgent goal.”*

*“I served in the Rochester school system for many years, and as a longtime educator, I view the challenges facing our children's education through the lens of a hands-on teacher. With this insight, I believe that the Rochester Education Fellowship is a very thoughtfully designed solution to a complex challenge. Nothing is more important than ensuring our children have access to the best education possible, and I believe this initiative will dramatically improve outcomes for underserved students in Rochester,” said Dr. Rita Gaither, Retired Rochester educator, Founder Pearl Resources, Inc.*

*“The Rochester Education Fellowship is uniting so many amazing local organizations devoted to improving education in Rochester, and is also listening to community feedback along the way. I’m glad to have a seat at the table representing parents in the school district and am looking forward to creating a positive change for all of our children,” said Mellanye Nesmith, ABC’s Policy Council and local parent.*

*“I lead UNCF’s advocacy efforts to ensure more African American students will be college-ready, and through my work, I understand the myriad of challenges they face to get to that point,” said Sekou Biddle, Vice President, Advocacy and Programs, UNCF.*

*“Systems-level change in schools is not only about making the current education system work better; it is also about transforming the system for the future. This Fellowship will do that.”*

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# Rochester

## Education Fellowship

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### GENERAL

**Q: What does the Rochester Education Fellowship search aim to achieve?**

**A:** We aim to build a coalition to select an exceptional leader to coalesce community partners—including those traditionally never afforded the opportunity to participate—to develop a bold and innovative vision for the future of education in Rochester.

**Q: How does an interested leader apply for the Rochester Education Fellowship?**

**A:** The Statement of Intent for the Fellowship is live! Read more about the Fellowship at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](http://RochesterEducationFellowship.org). The priority deadline is February 26 and submissions will be accepted until March 26.

**Q: What do you mean by “transformational education systems change”?**

**A:** Ultimately, the Fellow, in collaboration with Rochester families and communities, should decide what this means. However, this Fellowship is designed with the shared understanding that the status quo isn’t sufficient to serve students and families, nor to disrupt ingrained systems of oppression that block students and communities of color from success and generational wealth.

**Q: Who are the central partners for this project?**

**A:** The following Selection Committee members serve as aligned partners for the Rochester Education Fellow search:

- **Jerome Underwood (Co-chair)**, President & CEO of Action for Better Community (ABC), a Community Action Agency that promotes and provides opportunities for low-income individuals and families to become self-sufficient.
- **Angelica Perez-Delgado**, President & CEO of IBERO American Action League, a dual-language human services agency that ignites the potential of individuals and families in New York State’s Latino Community.

- **LaShunda Leslie-Smith**, Executive Director of Connected Communities, a group dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty through antiracist community revitalization and equitable resource coordination in the EMMA and Beechwood neighborhoods.
- **Dr. Dirk Hightower**, Senior Associate at Children’s Institute, a non-profit that partners with community agencies and schools to equip and support those who work with children and to strengthen the social and emotional health of children.
- **Mellanye Nesmith**, Parent, serves as the Treasurer on ABC’s Head Start Policy Council of Monroe County whose goals are to develop and maintain Head Start as a quality program, foster the philosophy of parent involvement, shared decision-making and improving the quality and effectiveness of the program’s child outcomes. Mellanye is the parent of two young children.
- **Dr. Rita Gaither**, Founder of Pearl Resources Inc., a nonprofit committed to eradicating the stigma associated with mental health, providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities, leading people to financial freedom, providing youth opportunities to experience domestic and international travel and providing stability through residential opportunities and leadership programs for young school-age men experiencing homelessness.
- **Rick DeJesus-Rueff**, Community Member, retired from full-time work after a 44-year career in higher education serving at seven different colleges in a variety of administrative and teaching roles.
- **Reenah Golden**, Founder & Artistic Director for The Avenue Blackbox Theatre, a theatre located in Historic Joseph Avenue neighborhood created to offer affordable, meaningful, culturally-rich experiences created by artists of color, youth, queer folk and collaborators.

Learn more and apply at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](http://RochesterEducationFellowship.org).

Questions? Email Amber at [fellowship@rochestereducationfellowship.org](mailto:fellowship@rochestereducationfellowship.org).

- **Holli Budd (Co-chair)**, Executive Director of the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation, a Rochester-based Foundation that strives to make long-term and meaningful contributions in Monroe and Ontario Counties with half of its grants supporting Jewish Life, and the other half supporting secular activities with a large emphasis on urban education.
- **Sekou Biddle**, Vice President of Advocacy for the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), a nonprofit working to increase the total annual number of African American college graduates by focusing on activities that ensure more students are college ready, enroll in college, and persist to graduation.
- **David Harris**, Partner at The City Fund, a nonprofit that partners with local leaders to help build innovative public school systems.

**Q: Why is an Educational Fellowship needed in Rochester?**

**A:** The current challenges facing Black, Brown, and economically marginalized students and families are deeply embedded in the design of the systems and structures of our nation and Rochester. However, these systems and structures can also be redesigned to produce greater quality-of-life outcomes for all. The Rochester Education Fellowship aims to identify an exceptional leader to coalesce community partners—including those traditionally never afforded the opportunity to participate—to develop a bold and innovative vision for the future of education in Rochester.

## FELLOW SELECTION

**Q: What are the key considerations in choosing the Fellow?**

**A:** Ideal candidates will exhibit the following:

- Deep understanding of Rochester
  - Ability to co-create a vision for educational equity with deep community input and support
  - Has an established local network and positive reputation across multiple stakeholder groups
  - Understands the local and state education landscape, laws, and history
  - Can clearly communicate how oppressive systems, particularly racism, has shaped Rochester's history and current inequities
- Theory of education change
  - Has experience pursuing and achieving improved outcomes for underserved students and/or communities
  - Can compellingly communicate the need to balance patience and urgency in education systems change
- Political Entrepreneurism
  - Can create a bold vision, seek opportunities to move the vision forward while navigating risks, and achieve desired outcomes aligned with the vision

- Understands power, local and state political systems, and cycles

- Can build strategic, broad-based support for a vision of educational equity

- Can lead a strong, healthy organization to execute change

- Relationships and Influence

- Able to build authentic relationships with those most impacted by inequity

- Builds widespread allies and support, from grassroots to grasstops

- Strategically leverages relationships and social capital to influence outcomes

**Q: When is the final selection of the Fellow?**

**A:** We expect the Fellow to be selected in June 2021, and be announced publicly by the end of summer 2021.

**Q: How much planning time will the Fellow have?**

**A:** The Fellow will have two years of planning time.

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# Rochester

## Education Fellowship

*Rochester's students and families deserve an urgent plan for transformative education systems change. Students in Rochester, particularly students of color and those from low-income households, do not have enough high-quality school options and a homegrown approach is needed to move toward educational equity.*

### The need for bold, systemic change

**44%** of students under the age of 18 in Rochester are **living in poverty**.

**Only 8%** of students in grades 3–8 are **mastering math and reading on grade level**, compared to the **state average of 40%** in both subjects.

The district's 2016 **four-year graduation rate** was **48%**, dramatically lower than the **statewide percentage of 80%**.

In 2016, the Rochester City School District **dropout rate** was **24%**, far exceeding the **state average of 6%**.

Rochester City School District has experienced **high turn-over in leadership**, with **seven different permanent or acting superintendents** over the last 10 years.

**To increase academic achievement, graduation rates, and overall life outcomes, bold change is needed now to create educational equity for Rochester students and families.**

### About the Fellowship

The Rochester Education Fellow will enter a two-year Fellowship to build a new, community-centered vision for bold, transformational change for Rochester's public school system. The Fellow will have a commitment of support and collaboration from anchor Rochester organizations to ensure the work and strategies they create will have a lasting impact.

### Candidate profile

The Rochester Education Fellow Selection Committee seeks candidates who have:

- An unapologetic commitment to equity, with a laser-like focus on achieving equitable outcomes for students and families,
- Deep historical understanding of education systems in Rochester and beyond, including the impact these systems have had on student success and communities of color,
- Experience managing at the executive level and navigating existing political systems and structures,
- The ability to build momentum and a coalition in partnership with the local community.

Learn more and apply at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](http://RochesterEducationFellowship.org).

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## Salary and Fellowship benefits:

- The two-year Fellow will be paid a competitive salary commensurate with their experience level, as well as healthcare and benefits
- The Fellowship will support the costs associated with launching new work and strategies to support the vision created
- Access to personalized executive coaching, and deep expertise and feedback from local Selection Committee leadership on organizational design, community engagement, and strategy development
- Commitment to support and collaboration from anchor Rochester organizations

## Application and selection process

The Statement of Intent submissions portal is now open at [RochesterEducationFellowship.org](https://RochesterEducationFellowship.org). Interested candidates will also find resources to support a strong application, including a Successful Candidate Toolkit, online office hours, and more.



## Coalition of community support

The Rochester Education Fellowship Selection Committee consists of local partner organizations with a strong history of supporting the city's youth and families.

- **Jerome Underwood (Co-chair)**, President & CEO of Action for Better Community (ABC)
- **Angelica Perez-Delgado**, President & CEO of IBERO American Action League
- **LaShunda Leslie-Smith**, Executive Director of Connected Communities
- **Dr. Dirk Hightower**, Senior Associate at Children's Institute
- **Mellayne Nesmith**, Rochester parent, who serves as the Treasurer on ABC's Head Start Policy Council of Monroe County
- **Dr. Rita Gaither**, Founder of Pearl Resources Inc.
- **Rick DeJesus-Rueff**, Community Member, retired higher education professional
- **Reenah Golden**, Founder & Artistic Director for Avenue Blackbox Theatre
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The Selection Committee will lead the search and selection process for the Fellow, and will also provide support during and after the two-year Fellowship.

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