

Fellowship awarded to build community-centered change for public school systems

Velvet Spicer, 9.23.21



The Rochester Education Fellowship, led by a coalition of local child and family advocates, has named Shanai Lee as the recipient of its two-year fellowship to co-create and build a new community-centered vision for bold, transformational change for Rochester’s public school systems.

Lee brings 15 years of experience working in Rochester schools to address the long-standing, dynamic challenges presently facing Rochester’s students in the pursuit of a quality education — many of which were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, officials noted.

“Growing up in Rochester and being educated in the Rochester City School District, my personal experiences have shaped how I will approach this unique opportunity to secure a brighter future for Rochester’s children,” Lee said. “I am committed to my community and I know the importance of having a high-quality education. I look forward to working with families and stakeholders to create real change in our education system that will have a lasting effect on our current students and parents as well as future generations.”

Lee brings to the role extensive experience working in urban education and local government and has held leadership positions in the Rochester City School District as well as a local charter network. She most recently worked as regional senior director of Uncommon Schools and previously held several positions within RCSD for more than 13 years including district clerk, assistant to the CFO and director of minority and women-owned business enterprises program.

Lee received an Ed.D. in educational leadership and administration, a Master's Degree in educational policy and an MBA in finance and public accounting from the University of Rochester and a Bachelor of Arts in economics from Cornell University.

The Rochester Education Fellowship Selection Committee, 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), led the extensive search and selection process for the Fellow beginning in January and will provide support for the duration of the two-year Fellowship.

In January 2021, the Farash Foundation, in collaboration with the selection committee, partnered with the Mind Trust, an education nonprofit organization, to lead the recruitment and selection process for the Rochester Education Fellowship. The goal of the process was to identify candidates with a thorough 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. The committee received robust feedback from the Rochester community around the key qualities and experiences to take into account during the search.

"After a rigorous community-focused search, we're excited to announce Shanai as Rochester's Education Fellow and believe she has the ideal background to bring transformational change to our educational systems in the city of Rochester," Underwood said. "The challenges that students and families in Rochester face are both unique and reflective of the inequities present in our nation, many of which were exacerbated by the pandemic. This is an opportune time to start this community-centered effort."

Through her Fellowship, Lee will have access to 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.

"The Farash Foundation is committed to the long-term health and wellbeing of Rochester's children and catalyzing a city-wide effort to transform Rochester's education system through this two-year fellowship," Budd said. "We're extremely happy to continue partnering with local leaders and organizations in support of Shanai as she begins the Rochester Education Fellowship."

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