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RWU's Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education Launches SCOREcard Project to Design Community Measures of Progress toward Equity in Providence Schools

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PROVIDENCE – With the launch this week of its Schools and Communities Organizing for Racial Equity (SCORE) project, Roger Williams University’s [Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education](#) (CYCLE) is amplifying the voice and expertise of parents and students through a community-driven design process for tracking progress toward educational equity in Providence’s public schools.

Nationally, assessment of school improvement and success often focus on a blanket approach to academic measures, such as standardized test scores, that leave out the important perspectives and cultural values that are intrinsic to local communities. As the pandemic has starkly illuminated, students of color and students facing the challenges of poverty experience greater adversities and inequalities in public school than their white and more affluent peers.

“In Rhode Island, Black and Latinx youth, in particular, are encountering disproportionately unequal outcomes in our public schools,” said CYCLE Executive Director Keith Catone. “The state takeover of the Providence Public School District creates additional structural challenges for the community’s voice to be heard on how they’d like their schools to improve. However, from the start, youth and parents

have been clear that it is also an opportunity to assert their vision for Providence public schools.”

CYCLE will collaborate with the Social Policy Hub for Equity Research in Education (SPHERE) at Rhode Island College, Parents Leading for Educational Equity, and Providence public high school students to develop a set of equity-oriented priorities and measures to support improvement in the Providence Public School District. Through a year-long process, a parent and youth research team will drive the design of a [“SCOREcard” to evaluate PPSD on equity indicators](#) that the community identifies as important to them.

The project is funded by a \$281,701 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and a \$300,000 grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

“For the past two decades, school accountability has operated as a top-down enterprise. We want to flip accountability on its head, so that it is community-driven,” Catone said. “Looking at these issues through a lens of racial equity, it becomes even more important to ensure the process for measuring progress is attentive to particular places and people, and offers a grounded understanding of a community’s vision for its public schools, especially in communities of color.”

Community collaboration that delivers a meaningful impact for our partnering communities is at the heart of RWU's work across Rhode Island and the region. CYCLE will facilitate the community-centered process, in collaboration with SPHERE, by empowering the parent and student team with research and design options to inform their decisions in developing a SCOREcard specific to evaluating educational equity in Providence public schools.

"I am really excited about the opportunity to work on a team with thoughtful, dynamic, conscientious researchers at CYCLE, who have so much experience working with youth and other community members in Rhode Island," said SPHERE Director Adrienne Goss. "SPHERE is contributing its collective expertise in qualitative research methods that are centered on cultural responsiveness and social justice, along with diverse experiences in school administration, leadership, teaching, and youth work."

The parent and youth research team has been appointed, with five representatives from Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE) and five students who attend Providence public high schools. They will have their first meeting this week to kick off the initiative.

"PLEE is thrilled to partner with CYCLE and SPHERE to center the voices and experiences of BIPOC

families in Providence Public schools,” said Ramona Santos Torres, president of PLEE-Rhode Island and parent of a Providence public schools student. “We look forward to co-creating spaces of shared learning, accountability and equity that will reflect the people who are most impacted by the inequities and racism we see in our school system today.”

The group aims to present the SCOREcard to the school district by the fall and work with school officials to implement it during the next school year. CYCLE, SPHERE, and the community research team will also be documenting their design process along the way. This documentation, specifically funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant, will aim to provide clear guidance for making the community-driven SCOREcard process a model for local school districts across the country.

“This community-centered process could serve as an example for how other communities, in Rhode Island and nationally, might rethink educational equity and accountability for school improvement,” Catone said.