



Letter to Fellows

Supporting Teachers & Schools

March 2024

Dear Rowland Fellows,

I hope this message finds you doing well this spring.

As you already know, the mission of the Rowland Foundation is to *invest in Vermont teachers to positively change the culture and climate of schools*. In a moment when teachers say their job is harder than ever, and schools face unforeseen economic, social, and political challenges, our work to support teachers and schools seems more important than ever.

I'll be candid here. The work of Rowland Fellows has not gotten any easier since the COVID-19 pandemic. It's harder to find long-term substitutes to ensure Fellows have The Gift of Time to do their work. It's harder to find subs to convene steering committee meetings, to travel with colleagues, or even to bring school teams to the Annual Conference. According to some reports, the sub shortage has been exacerbated by the fact that 1) sub pay has not kept pace with other jobs, 2) fewer young people are choosing teaching as a profession, and 3) teachers are [taking more sick days](#), just in order to survive at work. This is a staff shortage triple whammy that has not made our work any easier.

What's more, there is ample research that shows that people flee to the familiar when under pressure. In other words, people under pressure have a [penchant for going with the devil we know](#), even when a new approach would be more beneficial. In some ways this is common sense, after all, how many of us feel creative and innovative when we're in "survival mode"? So you can see how leading school change—even when it's the change we need—is not getting any easier.

You can sometimes see this play out with educators when working on even incremental changes to instructional practice or school structures. Even before the pandemic, educators were complaining about "initiative fatigue" due to the number and frequency of major school reform initiatives. So now, it seems like some educators are stuck in a paradox that's something like, "Nothing works around here. My job is impossible. Please don't change a thing." Again, I understand why educators don't think they have bandwidth to even try a different approach (e.g., restorative practices, universally designed instruction, culturally responsive teaching, collaborative practices), and yet, to find a way forward we will surely need to change business as usual, and not look to familiar strategies for solutions. I mean, if things haven't worked in the past, why would they now?

I made a similar argument about this broken feedback loop in [Schools Need Redesign, Not Recovery](#). And if you missed Jess DeCarolis's (RF09) moving speech at the 2022 Rowland Conference, check it out! It's called [Rethinking School and Community: Centering Hope in School and Community](#), and it deserves to be reread often. Jess makes the case that hope isn't passive; it requires strong action and clear beliefs. I walk around with Jess's message in my head, "*Hope is a hammer. Be the hammer.*"

That's why I am grateful to be working for the Rowland Foundation, an organization that validates teachers, cultivates *collective* teacher efficacy, and believes in the democratic mission of school. Whenever I tell people about what we do, they always say something like, "Wow! That's amazing that you support and celebrate teachers like that, especially nowadays!" I believe that a Rowland Fellowship—this incredible vote of confidence in our teachers, our *essential workers* who are "in the trenches" with students everyday— is more powerful and more necessary than ever.

I also believe that the only way forward is together. Rowland Fellows need the partnership of their colleagues, students, and principals to be successful. Our work in cohort meetings reminds us how much more we can learn from each other across our little valleys in Vermont. Our wonderful Rowland network of over 100 Fellows and 50 schools around Vermont is now a sprawling number of educators, all at various stages of their careers, but all with the shared belief that we need to keep innovating in order to better serve our students. When I talk with Fellows participating in our new Rowland Encore Grant Teams, or the Rowland Women's Leadership Retreat, or the All Fellows Retreat, I always step away with new hope and inspiration. I also take hope in thinking about the amazing difference our [Rowland DEW Scholars](#) will make in Vermont schools...and that they may soon apply for Rowland Fellowships!

When it comes to [The Rowland Approach](#), there are other things that I love, of course. I'm glad that our mission focuses on culture and climate, because nothing could be more important. I'm proud of the fact that we believe in shared leadership, including with students and community members. I relish the idea that our annual call for proposals is a truly open one—we don't promote a silver bullet, but rather ask teachers for their creative ideas for school change. I love how we (humbly) try to walk our talk when it comes to how we do the work (see my recent journal article with Jeanie Phillips (RF14), [How We Do the Work Matters: Turning Beliefs Into Action](#)).

Finally, I am grateful that we put our time and effort into joyfully supporting teachers and schools, as opposed to asking Fellows and their schools for quarterly reports, impact evaluations, or other accountability measures. With our powerful mission devoted to culture and climate, "We're not going to try to measure the immeasurable," as Chuck Scranton once said to me.

So I look forward to our next conversations, dear colleagues & friends! Let's keep doing everything we can to elevate educators and bolster Vermont schools in these tricky times. Meanwhile, I'm going to hang onto my mantra from Jess, "*Hope is a hammer. Be the hammer.*"

Wishing you & your loved ones all the very best,

Mike

P.S. Thank you for sending me your news, celebrations, photos, and courtesy postings for this letter each month!

P.P.S. Do you have any ideas about school or learning that you would like to share? Please feel free to send us a Rowland Blog post! No length or genre requirements—it doesn't have to be an op-ed or position paper. Personal essays, poetry, photos and other media and genres are most welcome. Feel free to contact Abby abby@therowlandfoundation.org or me with any questions or ideas.

Rowland Foundation Updates

Introducing the 2024 Cohort of Rowland Fellows!

We are pleased to welcome three new schools to the Rowland network this year: Proctor, Barnet, and Hartford! It's also a pleasure to continue our work in partnership with middle grades educators this year. Special thanks to all of the Rowland Fellows who spread the word, encouraged colleagues to apply, or wrote letters of support for this year's candidates.

Sarah Marcus & Sandra Celauro

Grades 9-12 Science Teacher and Literacy Interventionist, Proctor Junior/Senior High School

"strengthening instructional practices related to literacy, universal design, and MTSS in secondary classrooms"

Beverly McCarthy & Melissa Bushey

Grades PK-8 Visual Art Teacher and Library Media & Technology Specialist, Barnet School

"reshape systems and supports...so that our students can function in a culturally and racially diverse world"

Brad Miller

Grades 9-10 Social Studies Teacher & Harkness Coach, Champlain Valley Union High School

"embed the Harkness Method into CVU's culture at the systems level for both students and teachers"

William Prue

Grades 9-12 Band & Music Teacher, North Country Union High School

"facilitate meaningful collaboration between community members and NCUHS students, thereby cultivating a stronger and more cohesive learning community"

Melissa Wyman

Grades 9-12 English Teacher & Instructional Coach, Hartford High School

"engage with students, educators, local business leaders, and other experts to build out the place-based learning opportunities in our school"

The Annual Rowland Conference



New Date! The **13th Annual Rowland Conference** will take place on Thursday, October 17, 2024 on the theme of *Democracy & School* with keynote speaker Jill Lepore. Dr. Lepore writes for *The New Yorker* and teaches at Harvard. She is the author of [These Truths](#), a one-volume history of the United States that was a New York Times bestseller. You can also catch her on the Pushkin Industries podcasts [The Last Archive](#) or [Elon Musk: The Evening Rocket](#). Here are some of [Mike's favorite Jill Lepore quotes](#).

Dr. Lepore also recently submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court, [discussed here](#).

Rowland Foundation Website

Our new [Rowland Foundation Website](#) is up! Deepest thanks and sincere congratulations to Senior Rowland Associate Lori Lisai (RF14) on the successful completion of this huge project. For many months now, Lori has worked tirelessly with technical assistants and the Rowland Foundation staff designing, iterating, editing, consulting, debugging, refining, and then designing some more! This spring, we will continue work to improve accessibility features and graphic design elements on the site.

As you explore the new Rowland Foundation website, feel free to send Lori your comments, questions, and compliments: lori@therowlandfoundation.org

Call for Content

Please send any photos, video, or important artifacts from your Rowland Fellowship experience to Senior Associate Lori Lisai (RF15). Now that every Rowland Fellowship has its own page on our website, we would love to include artifacts from your Fellowship work, including, but not limited to, presentations, communications, student testimonials, event flyers, program descriptions, etc. With your permission, we also hope to incorporate some of your photos, video, and docs into Rowland Short Films to help tell the story of the Rowland Foundation's work around the state.

Check out these examples from [Anja Pfeffer \(RF21\)](#), [Janis Boulbol & Kat Robbins \(RF21\)](#), [Marsha Cassel & Erica Wallstrom \(RF14\)](#), and [Tom Sabo \(RF11\)](#).

Rowland Women's Leadership Retreat



Courage and Compassion is the theme for the 2024 Annual Rowland Women's Retreat being held at Basin Harbor Club. Female-identifying Rowland Fellows will be gathering from midday on **Sunday May 19th through Monday May 20th** for a soulful, embodied and restorative event that will support our unique women leaders.

Hopefully you have already seen an email from the organizers and already responded with your intent to participate. If you have not responded, and are still interested in attending, please email Angela, Abbie, or Ellen directly as soon as you can as they are trying to move forward with their planning. Angela Bauer: abauer@orangesouthwest.org Abbie Bowker: abowker@cvsdvt.org Ellen Berrings: eberrings@huusd.org

Celebrations





Elizabeth Placencia's (RF23) research and work on teacher preparation recently brought her to Ireland and Switzerland (seen above with colleagues). The framed photograph is from a principal in Dublin with the word for "friendship" in Irish. The chocolate and soap are from a teaching college in Luzern, who set up much of Elizabeth's visit while there. [These photos](#) are of a grade K-6 school she visited outside of Luzern, where new teachers, the principal, and an eager group of 12 year-olds met with her. [These](#) are outside the teaching college, PH Luzern.



The Rowland Foundation Board of Trustees would like to recognize Caitlin Steele's (RF09) service on the Board since 2018 (*seen here with Senior Associate Jeanie Phillips*). Now that she is serving as Principal of Middlebury Union High School, Caitlin decided to step down from the Board. "As the first Rowland Fellow to be on the Board, Caitlin has provided us with a unique perspective, which has made her an invaluable Board member," said Board Chair Heidi Lynn, "Her wisdom, experience, and thoughtful reasoning has helped us immensely over the years, and I speak for the entire Board when I say that we are sad to see her go."

Courtesy Postings



THE **ROWLAND** foundation



The Great Schools Partnership, The Rowland Foundation & Shelburne Farms are pleased to sponsor two new course offerings starting this summer, both designed and instructed by Senior Associate Jeanie Phillips (RF14):

Collaborative Practices for Equity

August 21-23, September 30, and November 8, 2024 from 9am-4pm

This is a highly participatory course designed for teachers and administrators interested in developing the skills necessary for leading equity work. Participants will actively build a culture that supports collaboration and will reflect on the process of sustaining a collaborative culture in their own settings. [Please share the flyer with colleagues!](#)

Responsive Facilitation for Systems Change

August 19-20, October 1, November 7, and December 9, 2024 from 9am-4pm

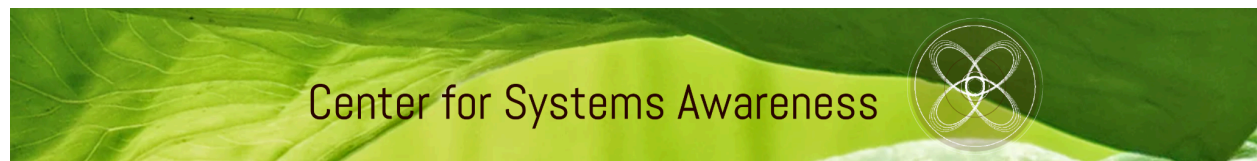
This course is designed to build on the Collaborative Practices for Equity course with school leaders in mind. Participants will practice intentional agenda design and responsive facilitation. They will build an understanding of adult learning theory, systems change models, and liberatory pedagogies. They are strongly encouraged to leverage this course for systems change in their own settings. [Please share the flyer with colleagues!](#)



If you haven't registered for the Great Schools Partnership's annual conference, **School Redesign in Action**, now's the time! This year's theme: *Bold Vision, Bold Action*. With over 40 workshops from schools and organizations across 12 states, you're sure to find learning opportunities that fit your unique context. Plus, there will be six extended conference sessions facilitated by Great Schools Partnership staff, so you can dig deeper into topics like advisory systems, multi-tiered systems of support, diversifying the educator workforce, and more. Don't miss seeing Rowland Fellows in action! Mike Martin ('09), Jeanie Philips ('14), Erica Wallstrom ('14), Emily Gilmore ('17), Melissa Wyman ('24!!!) will all be presenting their work in moving educational equity forward. Please reach out to Emily Gilmore with any questions (egilmore@greatschoolspartnership.org)

Deadline for registration ([link here](#)) is **Friday, March 8, 2024**.

Camels Hump Middle School is looking for a school guidance counselor for the remainder of the school year. If you know of anyone that might be interested, please contact Gretchen Muller (gretchen.muller@mmuusd.org)



In partnership with Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, Peter Senge & the Center for Systems Awareness are pleased to announce a 3-day introduction to **Compassionate Systems Leadership** to take place in Vermont May 6-8, 2024 (9:00am - 5:00pm). For details and registration, please contact Bahia El Oddi beloddi@mit.edu



The VPA recently released their spring professional learning offerings. The options include a book group for, *Bumbling Humans: Reflections on Liberatory Change*. This book was written by local author, Lucinda Garthwaite and the book group will be led by Mike McRaith (RF '13). Learn more about the VPA [spring offerings](#) available to all educators.



BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND BEYOND 2024

Rights Right On!

Learn about and experience the power of freedom songs in the civil rights movement of the mid-1990s.



Clemmons Family Farm's Black History Month and Beyond Special Edition Curriculum for grades K-12 will be available free of charge from February 1 - March 29, 2024.

Check out these amazing resources from [Clemmons Family Farm](#)! They will continue to make some of their excellent curriculum available to schools free of charge this month.



[Burlington City & Lake Semester \(BCL\)](#) has an anticipated opening for a new staff member–job title to be finalized soon–to serve in a unique role which includes teaching, community organizing, and elements of program management. It is a full-time Burlington School District position, co-funded by the BSD and BCL's core partner, Shelburne Farms.

BCL is an award-winning place-based program that offers a diverse group of Burlington High School students an opportunity to step away from their conventional schedule and use the city as both classroom and curriculum. It embodies many authentic learning practices, including but not limited to experiential learning, inquiry cycles, youth-adult-partnerships, and proficiency-based and student-centered assessment. For students and faculty alike, this real-world program is both engaging and empowering.

Visit the [BCL website](#) for updates about this exciting opportunity!



1st Annual Vermont Educator Fair

March 22, 1:00-5:00 PM at Middlebury High School

***Save
the
Date***

Upcoming event for employers, educators, and future educators! [More details here.](#)