



Teacher Beliefs

March 2026

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

I hope you are enjoying the spring weather and driving safely!

I had the great pleasure of attending Jeanie Phillips's (RF14) doctoral dissertation defense this week (see Celebrations below). Jeanie's qualitative research focused on how communities of practice can change teacher beliefs in order to make a difference for our students. She used a case study methodology to delve into how teacher beliefs were changed by the [Collaborative Practices for Equity \(CPE\) course](#) that she teaches for all new Rowland Fellows, and she conducted interviews with Rowland Fellows across three different cohorts who had undergone this foundational experience as new Fellows.

Working across many school settings, Jeanie had noticed a pattern of deficit-based talk about students and how this affects equitable outcomes. For her, certain expressions reflect a hardened mindset around what students are perceived to be capable of, for example, "Tier 2 kids", "at-risk students", or "You know that family...".

Conversely, excluding a student from certain groups reflects a similar limiting effect about a student's potential, for example, saying that a student was not an "honors student", "AP kid", or "high flyer". Jeanie's observations about how teacher beliefs shape reality are backed up by research, including [John Hattie's](#), which found that teacher expectations are among the most powerful influences on student outcomes.

Jeanie's study investigated how teachers' beliefs can evolve in a community of practice, like a Rowland Fellows Cohort or her CPE course, notably through praxis, the combination of action and reflection championed by [Paolo Freire](#). What she found was that a sustained focus on equitable practices over time can lead to asset-based framing when it comes to students. In other words, shared inquiry in a safe space, with intentionality and collaborative practice, helped shift teachers' beliefs about their students' potential for the better.

This finding is incredibly important when we consider that high expectations for all learners has been a tenet of culturally responsive teaching, at least since [Gloria Ladson-Billings's work](#) in the 1990s. Even better, Vermont's new Education Quality Standards that went into effect July 1, 2025, emphasize a similar approach in the section on Instructional Strategies, which begins

Educators shall be supported in:

(a) examining their own identities and biases;

(b) fostering a learning environment that recognizes multiple ethnic, cultural and racial perspectives; presents and critiques historical counter-narratives; and encourages students to examine issues and expressions of social equity within and beyond the classroom or school;

(c) modeling and setting high expectations for all students – regardless of a student’s prior academic experience, family background, socio-economic status or (dis)abilities and promoting respect for student differences;

This work gives me hope. In a moment when many Americans are being stigmatized or dehumanized based on their race, ethnicity, or gender, it is inspiring to think that by working together with intention, we can begin to dismantle the bias and discrimination that our students still experience in their daily lives. Jeanie’s research points toward an approach predicated on collective action, through communities of practice. Even as well-intentioned educators, we can’t do this work alone.

Jeanie and I wrote about the need for a different approach to collaboration in our article [How We Do the Work Matters: Turning Beliefs Into Action](#). We need to develop new muscles when it comes to collaboration, and new approaches to the way we work in schools.

This is where the Rowland Foundation’s work has been critical in recent years. Our cohort model, annual conference, and retreats are spaces where innovation and collaboration flow from the joy and relational trust that can only come from a deep and shared commitment to doing the work in a new way.

I am deeply honored to be part of this work.

See you soon,

Mike

P.S. Thanks to everyone for sending their personal, professional & family news! It's great to hear from you. And keep sharing your courtesy posts! We'll be glad to share them with our Rowland Foundation network.



Updates

15th Annual Rowland Conference

Baratunde Returns!



Yay! Due to overwhelming popular demand, Baratunde Thurston will return to give the keynote address for our **15th Annual Rowland Conference on Thursday, October 29, 2026** at UVM's Davis Center. We've only invited a keynote speaker to return once before—the formidable Ruha Benjamin, a friend of Baratunde's, was our keynote speaker in both 2017 & 2018.

Our working conference theme is *America at 250: We Need a Declaration of Interdependence*. Baratunde has been writing and speaking about our democracy's roots, as well as some, ahem, improvements for us to consider, especially in the Age of AI. If you're new to his work, [check out this article](#) where he makes the case for a Declaration of Interdependence. You can also tune into [Life with Machines](#), where he often questions whose future we're living in, or just watch his great standup chops on display in his [keynote at last year's Rowland Conference](#).

Tell your friends & colleagues the good news, and get your school team together! **Early-bird registration will open in April** so you can save your spot for this year's conference.

15th Annual Rowland Conference

Call for Workshop Proposals



We have amazing workshops at the Rowland Conference! Consider joining this tremendous group of Vermont educators and **send us your workshop proposal for this fall's conference**. In your proposal, you'll want to establish a clear connection to our conference theme, *America at 250: We Need a Declaration of Interdependence*. Just complete our [Workshop Proposal Form](#) and email it to info@therowlandfoundation.org by Friday, April 10, 2026.

Rowland Women's Leadership Retreat

More info coming soon!



Mark your calendars and save the date, Rowland Women Fellows! You are warmly invited to participate in this year's **Rowland Women's Leadership Retreat** to take place on **Sunday, June 7th & Monday, June 8th**, with the theme "Together We Rise." The planning team is finalizing details for the event site and will soon announce this year's location.

Please contact Samantha Mundt (RF21) & Gretchen Muller (RF17) with any questions or suggestions: samantha.mundt@wswsu49.org, gretchen.muller@mmuusd.org

Rowland Fellows at Work

District-Community Consortium

Several veteran Rowland Fellows were at the kick-off for the [New England District-Community Consortium](#), which will strengthen the public education ecosystem by connecting community-rooted solutions to state funding, policy, and practice through a connected effort that will drive even greater impact. With support from [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#) district teams will roll up their

sleeves to design, test, and ultimately advance solutions that are rooted in data and what they find works for their students. Recognizing the current budget landscape and the many demands facing public education, this multi-year funding opportunity will provide participating districts with free coaching and technical assistance from [Great Schools Partnership](#); participation in a community of practice; a customized data dashboard and data analytics; and eligibility for multi-year funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (\$100K–500K over three years). Seen here (*left to right*) **Gabe Hamilton (RF15)**, **Mike Martin (RF09)**, **Bianca McKeen (RF16)**, **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)**, **Erica Wallstrom (RF14)** & **Jean Berthiaume (RF09)**.

Rowland Fellows at Work

Harwood Uganda Experience



While traveling through Rwanda with a group of intrepid Harwood students, **Jonah Ibson (RF25)** left Kigali and stopped at the Rwandan School for Arts and Music in the southern province. They listened to a concert, got called up on stage to join in the dancing and music-making, and had time to interact with some of the local talent.



Celebrations



Congratulations, Dr. Phillips! Rowland Senior Associate **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)** is seen here at the University of Vermont this week, defending her doctoral dissertation entitled, *Shifting Teacher Beliefs: An Inquiry Into Communities of Practice as Sites for Transformational Learning*. Many friends and colleagues turned out to celebrate Jeanie's culminating work in UVM's Educational Leadership & Policy Studies program, which reflected her deep understanding of the educational landscape from her research and years of work in Vermont schools. Jeanie's dissertation is currently embargoed, however, she has provided permission for me to share an [overview here](#) from her dissertation defense. *Bravo, Jeanie!*





Courtesy Posts



Collaborative Practices for Equity is a highly participatory course designed for teachers and administrators interested in developing the skills needed to lead equity work in schools. Participants will explore and practice structures that encourage collaborative inquiry and

will consider how those structures might work in their schools. Participants will design impactful agendas, engage in feedback sessions, practice collaboration strategies, and apply their learning to their work in their schools. A fierce commitment to educational equity and excellence will be at the core of all the learning participants will do. The course meeting times are five wonderful in-person days at Shelburne Farms: **Aug. 18–20, Sept. 16 & Nov. 11, 2026**. Graduate course credit option available. [Register here!](#)



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