

TEAM RICHMOND

EQUITABLE ACCESS + EQUAL PARTNERS



FLAMBOYAN
FOUNDATION

National Family Engagement Fellowship



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TEAM OVERVIEW

// *Listening is key.* //

As the old adage goes, “Listening is key.” Under the leadership of Superintendent Jason Kamras and as laid out in their strategic plan, *Dreams4RPS*, Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is actively and intentionally centering the voices of families who have historically been left out of the decision-making process in efforts to support the academic success of all students across Richmond. This shift seeks to eliminate barriers for families to advocate for their children and has allowed for more African American, Latin American, and low-income families to be engaged in their children’s education.

The Community Hubs model that RPS launched in the Fall of 2020 at the height of COVID-19 has provided a bridge between schools and communities. Full-time Family Liaisons work within the hubs serving as neighborhood experts and resource navigators for families who need additional support. Community Hubs have been strategically placed throughout the city so that families across racial and socio-economic boundaries have access to resources that support student engagement, improve school-family communication, and increase parent advocacy. Most notably, Family Liaisons work with students who have attendance issues to re-engage them in school by developing collaborative family success plans which remove attendance barriers and promote positive engagement. Thanks to their efforts, chronic absenteeism dropped 10% during the 2021-2022 academic year.



TEAM OVERVIEW

Through an extensive variety of empathy interviews, pilot projects, and listening sessions across the city, three themes arose as to how to empower RPS families that have traditionally been underrepresented in decision-making. They are:

- ▶ Provide equitable access to power and resources for all families.
- ▶ Build effective communication channels across diverse stakeholder groups.
- ▶ Cultivate meaningful and lasting community trust in the school system.

Over the course of their time in the Fellowship, the Richmond Team has sought to build fluency in school district level decision-making for all families, but especially those who are traditionally underrepresented by Richmond Public Schools. This understanding has led to the development of three potential strategies that will help ensure that RPS has a culture that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion of all families. The proposed strategies are:

- ▶ Partner with a childcare provider to support on-site enrichment activities and dinner for students in grades K-5 during the first two hours of School Board meetings.
- ▶ Create a Community Liaison role that would include a stipend for parents/caregivers working on central issues for the Division.
- ▶ Pay for parents/caregivers to serve on existing committees that need diverse representation such as school renaming, school construction, and curriculum committees.

As the RPS team closes in on the final stages of the Flamboyant Fellowship, they are excited to continue the important work of uplifting the voices of families through data-driven and student-centered best practices that are linked to learning.

VISION

EQUITABLE ACCESS + EQUAL PARTNERS

Richmond Public Schools is providing equitable access to policy decisions and high-quality education by engaging underrepresented students, families, staff, and community members as equal partners in achieving student success.

STRATEGIC PLAN

OUTCOMES

(What needs to happen in the next 1-3 years to put your team on track to realizing your vision?)



1

Parents and families have equitable access to division-level decision making through Regional Parent Leadership Teams and other initiatives.

2

Families + students are empowered to guide the creation of high-quality education through hands-on learning opportunities and expanded specialty programs and schools.

BARRIERS

(What are the barriers to achieving your 1-3 year outcomes?)

- ◇ Decisions in Richmond Public Schools are made by the Richmond School Board, a group of elected officials who remain content with the status quo around whose voice is being elevated. (*Outcome 1*)
- ◇ More affluent families are better equipped and situated to influence school board members, especially at public meetings. (*Outcome 1*)
- ◇ Schools remain highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status, and re-zoning is too politicized to yield results. (*Outcome 2*)
- ◇ Systemic underfunding of urban school districts continues to undermine progress in ubiquitous and sometimes hidden ways. (*Outcome 2*)

STRATEGIES

(How can you overcome the barriers to achieving your outcomes?)

- ◇ Continue to build Parent Leadership Teams (PLT), and set them up to be co-creators and partners alongside school board members. (*Outcome 1*)
- ◇ Create public forums specifically to connect PLT members with school board members to jointly set policy priorities and formulate solutions as equal partners. (*Outcome 1*)
- ◇ Find creative ways to allocate resources equitably where they are most needed (example: STEM Academies in MLK and Henderson). (*Outcome 2*)
- ◇ Leverage JLARC study to improve funding formula for urban and rural school divisions. (*Outcome 2*)

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

(How will we know we have been successful?)

- ◇ PLTs exist in each of our regions — East End, South Side, North Side/West End — and meet with high level RPS decision makers at least once per quarter.
- ◇ Financial and other resources are allocated appropriately toward schools that need them the most (e.g., STEM Academies at MLK and Henderson, Arts School at George Wythe).
- ◇ The number of RPS families and community partners advocating each year at the state level for improved funding and school conditions rises by at least 10% each year.

MEET THE TEAM



Chasity Rodriguez, *South Side Community Hub Coordinator, Richmond Public Schools*

Chasity currently serves as a Community Hub Coordinator with RPS where she is responsible for building, managing and establishing a team to support programming, partnerships and engagement strategies for schools, students and families in the Southside region of Richmond, VA.

From serving as a tutor with America Reads to working on a taskforce with NYC Mayor Bloomberg to create community schools, Chasity uses her vast and varied experiences to continue to help empower families and communities in Richmond. She earned an undergraduate degree in Psychology from Virginia State University and a Master's in Social Work from New York University.



Dr. Erin Brown, *Director of Family + Community Engagement, Richmond Public Schools*

Dr. Brown currently serves as the Director of Family + Community Engagement, providing leadership over a dynamic team committed to student success through family engagement in RPS schools.

Prior to joining RPS, Dr. Brown worked at VCU's Division of Community Engagement and previously served as a nonprofit administrator and an elementary school teacher. Dr. Brown completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Virginia, double majoring in English Literature and African American Studies. She completed her Masters and Doctorate at VCU, studying Public Policy and Administration with a focus on higher education administration.



Grady Hart, *Coordinator of Community Partnerships, Richmond Public Schools*

As head of the RPS Community Partnerships team, Grady helps serve as a doorway for community partners, donors, and volunteers to support the needs of students and families. Grady led the creation and launch of a Community Partnerships Database and Asset Map, which empower RPS staff and families alike to activate and leverage community assets at the district, regional, and school levels.

Grady is a Richmond native and alumni of both James Madison University (B.A., 2012 and M.P.A, 2013) and Virginia Commonwealth University (M.B.A., 2017). He serves as an Adjunct Faculty Member with VCU's Honors College.



LaDesha Batten, *Mental Health Clinician, ChildSavers*

LaDesha currently serves as a Mental Health Clinician on the Immediate Response Team at ChildSavers, a local nonprofit specializing in providing trauma-informed mental health and child development services.

Prior to her current role, LaDesha spent time providing mental health services to children, teens and adults, in a variety of settings including outpatient, schools, and community-based settings. LaDesha earned a B.A. in Psychology from George Mason

University and a Master's in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University.



Nkenge Garrett, *Family Liaison, Richmond Public Schools*

Nkenge began working with Richmond Public Schools (RPS) as a Family Liaison in the Office of Engagement. As a Family Liaison, she supports the division by building upon family strengths, meeting community needs, providing resources to support increased attendance, and supporting ongoing family advocacy that informs the division's programs and policies.

Prior to joining RPS, Nkenge spent 15 years working with the District of Columbia's Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services and Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement where she led family and community advocacy efforts. Nkenge received her Bachelor's degree in Business Management from Hampton University and her Master's degree in Organizational Development from Trinity Washington University.



Raqiyah Cooper, *Recreation Services Manager of Federal Food and Out of School Time Programs, Richmond Parks, Recreation + Community Facilities*

Raqiyah currently serves the Richmond Parks Department, by creating program content directly related to the needs of youth and families in Richmond and leading her team to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals and quality recreation programming out of school.

With more than 20 years of experience under her belt, Raqiyah has a unique vantage point as she has not only served as an administrator of program development, but also is someone who has worked directly with youth in Richmond. Raqiyah has a B.S. in Business Administration from Averett University and is currently working on her M.B.A.

NOTES





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