



The Princeton Club of Rochester

Shalese Cotton Senior, Penfield High School

One of the proud findings of the Princeton Prize judges is that students have embraced the MOSAICS advocacy club and classes vigorously since their inception just a few short years ago, and today the club's forum provides even greater opportunities for students to educate and inform to end racial disparities. Shalese began her advocacy when she came to Penfield under Monroe County's Urban-Suburban program six years ago, and today, her position as co-president of MOSAICS gives her an integral voice in addressing race issues both within the club and beyond. Shalese says that while some of the topics -- such as police brutality -- aren't easy, they are necessary to effect change:

"I believe that it is time to get comfortable with the uncomfortable. I have done this by attending every ROC2 Change Summit since my freshman year and putting myself at the forefront of conversations discussing race relations."

Shalese is working in a leadership role in another area where students engage with adults in positions of power -- the classroom. She was also a driving force behind a student-led discussion panel where she created and delivered questions to faculty at more than 10 districts. Shalese had thoughtful insight into creating the questions, and describes the experience as illuminating:

"We opened their eyes to how it feels being the only minority in their class and how to correctly address us and any issues surrounding what they believe to be our life experiences."

Shalese continues to advocate in the classroom and beyond by planning field trips, hosting student events, and serving as a panel member for the production of future ROC2Change Race Summits. Penfield English teacher Jordan Garbarino says Shalese is uniquely qualified to serve in leadership roles:

"Shalese is a 'go-getter.' She is a tenacious and dedicated student and activist who never, ever gives up. I have never seen Shalese hold back in her willingness to be involved and engaged in what she has committed to."

And her advocacy is not limited to her high school years. Shalese says fighting for racial equality and harmony is her lifelong commitment:

"I will continue my dedication to race relations and issues surrounding diversity throughout the rest of my last year in high school, college and the entirety of my life."

The world will certainly be a better place thanks to your focused dedication, Shalese.