Cecily Relucio Hensler is an accomplished professional educator with nearly two decades of professional experience working in, with, and outside the Chicago Public Schools. She believes that the challenges of fighting for an equitable, just and humane education for all Chicago youth—especially those who have been most systemically disenfranchised—are immense, and that educational leaders of color are critical to the transformation of the present system and conditions.

Cecily began her career in education as an elementary classroom teacher at a public school on the southwest side of Chicago. Since transitioning from the classroom, she has been privileged to serve as a professional developer, instructional coach, university-based teacher educator, and program leader. She has served in leadership capacities in both teacher education and new teacher induction programming and policy, developing a specialized focus on diversity, equity, and social justice education.

Through her professional experiences, Cecily has developed a nuanced understanding of the educational system—the challenges as well as promising interventions—from a range of vantage points. She brings her lived experience of the barriers that educators of color face on a daily basis and difficult lessons learned about leadership, as well as clarity about how her experiences and knowledge as a woman of color are an asset and strength that she brings to her work.

In addition to her work with Surge, Cecily is a doctoral student in Curriculum Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research and teaching has been centered on using Critical Race Theory and praxis to critique and transform urban teacher education and teacher professional development. Her research seeks to identify interventions that contribute to diversifying the teacher workforce, by addressing structural barriers that interfere with the recruitment, preparation and retention of preservice and in-service teachers of color.

While her identity and experiences as an educator are central to who she is and how she hopes to make an impact upon the world, Cecily’s most cherished, important and challenging role in life is mothering her two biracial daughters, Vanessa and Mia, ages 14 and 9.