

**Puget Sound Educational Service District**

# **Critical Moments Reflections**

**Our Journey to Becoming an  
Antiracist Multicultural Organization**

November 2020

# 1 Introduction

Many thanks to the forty-nine people who participated in Critical Moment sessions or interviews and shared their memories of events and activities that advanced or hindered the PSESD's journey to becoming an Antiracist Multicultural Organization. The Critical Moments sessions were conducted in the summer of 2020, and introduced as a pilot project dedicated to a practice of honoring memories and telling a collective transparent story.

Your heartfelt remembrances and comments illustrate some of the values that both drive and emerge from your journey. Many individuals described what shifted as a result of these moments. For example, some shared accounts of things they learned that were catalysts for new organizational practices, while others talked about how critical moments changed the way they worked with community members, and the practices of outside institutions.

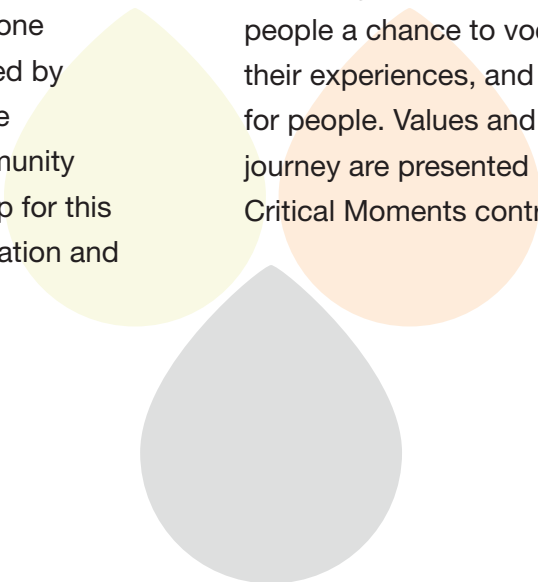
Critical Moment contributors include forty-six people who were members of different PSESD Strategic Direction Action Team (SDAT) workgroups; Executive Leadership Team; and the Transformation Team). Nine individuals attended sessions with more than one workgroup. The groups were co-facilitated and documented by Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg of the PSESD, and Annie Laurie Armstrong, a consultant from Business Government Community Connections. The Transformation Team provides leadership for this body of work, which is staffed by PSESD's Strategy, Evaluation and Learning Department.

Short reports were written and distributed following each workgroup to ensure that the documentation was accurate, and revisions were made as requested. The information collected from the above efforts is presented in this report by chronological order, noting approximately when certain critical moments happened.

Some were described as spanning multiple years. Many of the reflections are shared using people's own words. In addition, phone interviews were conducted by Annie Laurie Armstrong with six PSESD Board members to garner their impressions of PSESD's journey, as they are vital partners in this work.

As expected all individuals perceive and experience critical moments differently. Some were mentioned by more than one person, and are combined in this report to create a more detailed account. Almost all were accompanied by examples of what shifted in the organization's journey as a result. In this way, the critical moments were seen as pivotal by many to underscoring PSESD's journey. Sometimes the events, or series of activities also included examples of philosophical or policy changes, or critical observations about the work underway.

The collective stories build a multiple vantage point understanding of the organization's journey and evolution. This process also gives people a chance to vocalize and gain awareness and visibility for their experiences, and generate learning about what has taken place for people. Values and practices driving and/or emerging from this journey are presented at the bottom of the following pages. A list of Critical Moments contributors is presented at the end of this report.



## 2 Our Journey

### 2005-2010 | White Center Early Learning Initiative and Educare

**WHAT HAPPENED:** PSESD has a long history of prioritizing services to children of color and diverse community members through our early learning (Early Head Start, Head Start and ECEAP and Educare Seattle) programs. We have committed through our internal and external work to promote practices and policies which pave the way for children and families to experience, lead and benefit from engagement in high quality early learning programs.

2005

We prioritize family voice and leadership. For example, as a partner in the White Center Early Learning Initiative (2000-2010) we engaged with 500-600 families at convenings to seek their advice and garner their decisions regarding priority early learning, education and family support strategies.

On an ongoing basis we work diligently to promote and speak about our antiracism work both locally and nationally. As a member of the Educare Community Network Educare Seattle is the only childcare center in the Educare Network to be explicitly antiracist. We are the only Head Start/ECEAP program in the State of Washington to give priority points to children of color, and are among the first in the nation to do so.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** We have been advisors for the Head Start decisions around performance standards amendment strategies, drawing upon our experiences and training at the PSESD to engage in related discussions about the school to prison pipeline. The work we do locally results in improved learning outcomes for students. We have also funded a staff position which is important to us, though not a requirement or directive of funders, to provide race-equity focused leadership, resources and tools to our staff and subcontractors.

2010

*Our student data for children of color is higher performing than other Educare programs around the country, a result which we attribute largely to our antiracism practices.*

#### VALUE

Real conversations are essential; safe spaces are needed to have this happen

#### VALUE

Personal accountability is integral to doing race-based work and un-doing racism.

#### VALUE

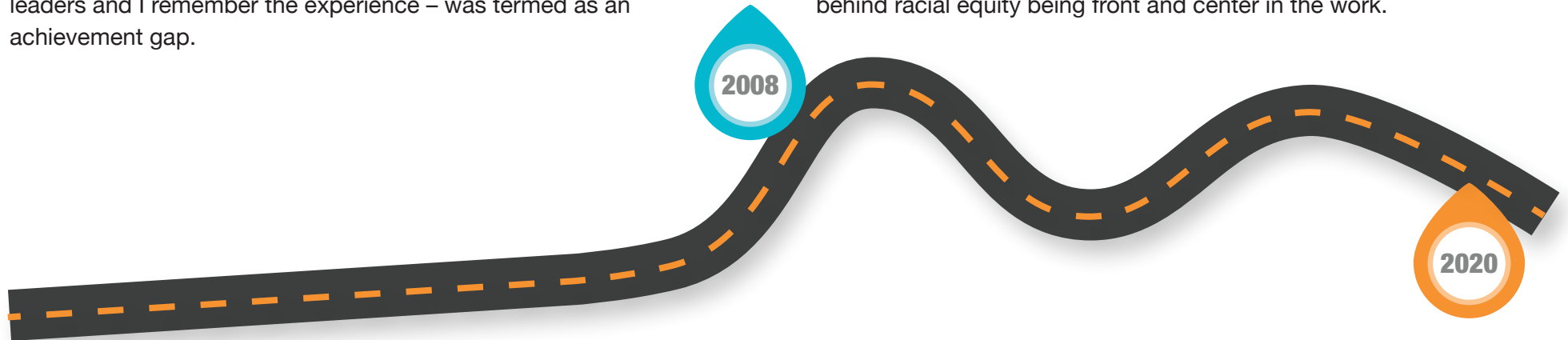
People are where they are and need opportunities to grow in their work to be antiracist.

#### VALUE

Embrace staff pushback on ideas; seek authentic drive to pursue the work.

## Prior to 2008 | School Improvement Data Carousels

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We were doing a lot of data carousels with schools and districts and we were presenting data disaggregated to help people put goals in place. The Superintendent asked if we would come to a meeting and lead a carousel meeting with executive leaders and I remember the experience – was termed as an achievement gap.



**WHAT SHIFTED:** Coming out of that meeting with a collective focus and collective goals as an agency that just wasn't something that they just talked about but it actually shifted from the four end statements that were general and broad and what we would do. We had not seen or experienced a collective focus until that moment.

## 2008-2020 | Sharing a Picture Which Tells a Thousand Words

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Many years ago the previous PSESD Superintendent Monte Bridges shared a picture of the PSESD cabinet at a meeting. The photo showed a cast of mostly white men, which clearly demonstrated for those at the all staff meeting about the “why” behind racial equity being front and center in the work.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** The photo has been shared in multiple presentations ever since, and clarified to others the reasons for the PSESD journey. It is a somber reminder to others that they might want to explore their own leadership. The legacy effect of this photo carries on, as it has been a vital tool for professional development and workforce equity.

### VALUE

Visibly take ownership and accountability for mistakes.

### VALUE

Moments create culture; it is important to pause and think about these particular moments.

### VALUE

We are connected through relationships. These allow us to not forget so we don't spin in a circle, but rather participate in a spiral, where there is movement

## 2008-2020 | Foundational Two Day Trainings

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We were sitting in various groups going through the foundational two day training and just that visceral response and feelings going through the air – what are you saying? I don't have privilege. The two day foundational training orients newly hired PSESD staff to learn more about what the organization stands for and how it expects staff to approach their work. It essentially sets the stage for their ongoing role as a member of an antiracist multicultural organization.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We are finally saying it out loud and naming it. We were talking about how we shift away from the status quo and avoidance of naming the dynamics that racism perpetuates. I don't have privilege and rejections of that thinking were a huge shift and I feel it comes up all the time. In 2014 PSESD staff focused their attention on transformational values. Crossroads, a consultant to PSESD, introduced transformational values as part of their work to guide the development of a racial equity policy. The two day foundational training and every day efforts of the organization were even more focused on these values. Staff talked more about PSESD's commitment to positive, antiracist transformation in individuals, organizations and social systems to actively progress along an antiracist, multicultural institution continuum. In 2020, when it became clear that the two day foundational training was not being consistently offered to new hires, the PSESD Equity in Education*

2008

*team conducted a large on line training to all the new hires who had not previously participated. There was a rejuvenated recognition of the importance of this training to grounding new workers from the beginning of their job at PSESD to the organizational values and approach. Also, there was a growing understanding that the two day foundational training is, by design, a vital resource that covers core concepts and values but will evolve over time be adapted to embrace new lessons and learning.*

## 2008-2020 | PSESD Race Equity Related Vocabulary

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Twelve years ago when we first started this work saying race was taboo and the trainings were called cultural competency trainings. There was huge outrage over the term white privilege and at one point we looked forward to the day when we could say readily say white supremacy.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Today we are able to say race, and using the term white supremacy is not something we have fears or concerns over expressing. These are just examples of some of the terms that over the course of our journey have become more accepted, understood and embraced. The amount of pushback to these and other race equity terms has dramatically reduced, and discussions about white supremacy are more commonplace.*

2020

### VALUE

Make space for holding up and prioritizing transformation values

### VALUE

Our collective work and words have the power to shift mindsets and equity-focused practices

### VALUE

To make progress we have to disrupt the colonizer systems and practices

### VALUE

Work framed as community-centered and community-led must be so

## 2008-2020 | Advancement and Turnover at the PSED

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Reflection comments revealed concerns about opportunities for advancement and about the turnover of people of color at the PSED. Examples follow: “If you don’t fit the mold, you won’t stay long...It’s not what you know. It’s who you know... Some people have to prove, prove, prove themselves, while others don’t earn their way, and move forward...The path for persons of color is different than the path for white people... Even though the PSED is making progress along our journey to become an antiracist, multicultural organization, too many people of color leave the PSED. We can’t say we are amazing, because we are not. The more we say that the more racist we are... “ With these considerations in mind in light of the need to promote the kind of environment and dynamic of care necessary to recruit and retain people of color in the agency the following advice was given:

- Ask people of color if they want to engage in conversations; but recognize that their silence does not necessarily mean they are complacent, or have nothing to say; rather they may be worried about the effect of their words on their employment, or may not want others to see their pain.
- Remember that some people have to prove themselves again and again in order to advance; while others seem to scale the ladder fast.
- Ensure that the culture of the agency is consistent across departments, and the messaging and expectations for staff behaviors on issues such as COVID are the same for persons who sit in different departments or seats in the organization.
- Question why and how leadership styles are potentially influenced by the changing demographics of the workforce.



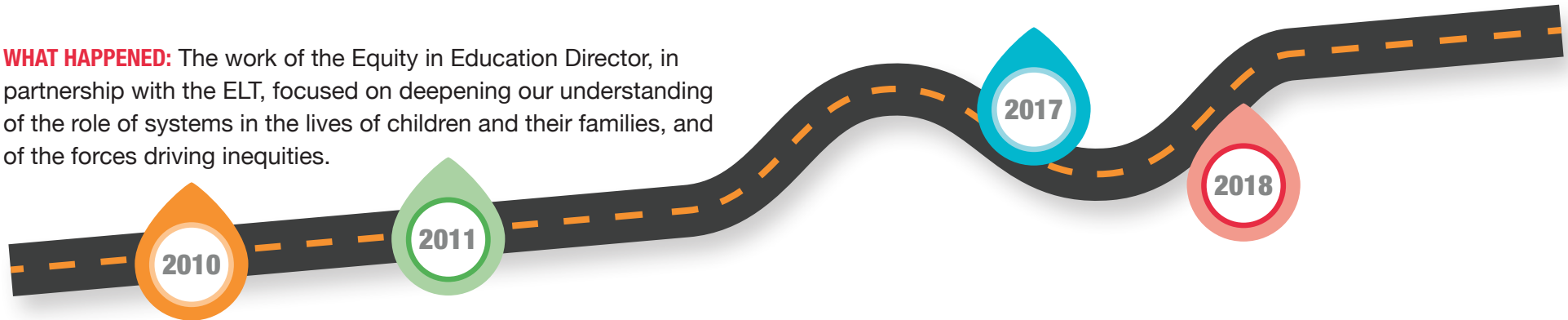
- Respect the experience that people bring to this agency regardless of the color of their skin.
- Recognize that it is painful for people of color that call out mistreatment and then people dismiss you.
- When people of color say they are uncomfortable they need a response from white people.
- Identify accountability processes and structures and be clear about who gets to decide whether and why staff concerns are moved forward.
- Recognize that turnover of people of color in this agency is an issue that may negatively influence how others, regardless of color, feel about working for the agency.



- Embrace the reality that advocacy is painful, as it was for John Lewis and Martin Luther King, and others who have paid the price for opening their mouth, for all persons who call out mistreatment, and is even more so when people are dismissive.
- Be aware that the journey PSED is on – while experiencing growth and progress in many areas is fraught with pain and setbacks for some staff. A somber reminder - at the very time George Floyd was being murdered, a white woman called a PSED staff person a “Negro.”

## 2010-2011 | ELT Team Focus on Systems

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The work of the Equity in Education Director, in partnership with the ELT, focused on deepening our understanding of the role of systems in the lives of children and their families, and of the forces driving inequities.



**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Our team changed their perspective. We shifted from achievement gap to opportunity gap and gained an understanding that this was a system issue and not a family and child issue. Taking a system focus was not a quick change but a series of conversations.*

## 2017-2018 | PSESD Pathway to Change

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The PSESD was involved in a strategic design process that catalyzed a lot of self-exploration and action. The PSESD had a new end and adopted “Success for Each Child and Eliminate the Opportunity Gap by Leading with Racial Equity”. This served as a call to action to have a more thoughtful and mission-driven accountability and measurement process in place. At the same time we didn’t have a collective theory of action. As an ESD we were a series of separate, fantastic programs. We undertook the theory of change development effort in each

department or unit to clarify how the work of each helps PSESD to move closer to our end so we engaged in a facilitative process to make this determination. We worked through our Strategic Design efforts to reframe how we engaged with the community and talked through our work.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The workgroup of people engaged in the above theory of change development efforts took their different department or unit theories and wove them into an agency- wide theory of change, which we later renamed Pathways to Change. This occurred in 2017-2018, and is now regarded as our basket Pathways of Change that describes our agency impact on systems, and on student outcomes that we expect to collectively impact as an organization of 400 individuals. Each unit or department approached this work in their own way. Notably, each leap they made moved us closer to success for each child to eliminate the opportunity gap by leading with racial equity.*

### VALUE

Own our beliefs and say beliefs out loud

### VALUE

Be clear and hold true to PSESD values

### VALUE

Call-in, not call-out

### VALUE

Combat processes that mirror white supremacy

## 2014-2017 | Racial Equity Policy work

**WHAT HAPPENED:** During this time there were many opportunities for the PSESD Board and others to stand up with school district partners to think about the importance of having a strong equity policy, particularly a strong racial equity policy. We worked to influence people and policy.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *There is so much more work to do – but adopting new policies and practices are one of the more important steps. Our work is gaining traction, and we get to share what we have learned.*



## 2016-2020 | PSESD Racial Equity Tool

**WHAT HAPPENED:** In 2016 PSESD staff was encouraged to use the Racial Equity Tool, which articulated PSESD's goal to eliminate racial inequity through creating an antiracist multicultural organization and closing the opportunity gap. This tool guided staff in how to incorporate a racial equity analysis as they were creating, and/or revising agency policy. Recognizing that the existence of a Racial Equity Tool alone was not an assurance of success, PSESD staff took steps to determine how the tool was being used to link agency goals to agency wide competencies in areas such as cultural proficiency, and to strategies that clearly revealed that they adhered to racial equity principles, racial equity mindset and transformational values. The agency wide competency development efforts began in the fall of 2016, were piloted in 2018, and more fully launched in 2019. This effort is evolving and ramping up in 2020. PSESD staff believes there is room for improvement to use this tool more seamlessly for decision making, noting that sometimes the drive to get things done supersedes this effort.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The Racial Equity Tool is being used by human resources and organizational development staff to scrutinize many different hiring policies and procedures. The work we are doing underscores how we have engaged others across the agency to develop policies and procedures that are cognizant of barriers and antiracist practices on systems and services. The human resources staff had concerns about how we are/are not contributing to barriers. We began to really interrogate the way that we operate to ensure that we are aren't mitigating or perpetuating negative situations, and changed our hiring practices as a result.*

*PSESD also used the tool to revise the mobile stipend policy and enact a policy that was more in line with the values of the organization. Workgroup members surveyed and interviewed staff who worked in different types and levels of jobs across the organization to learn about how they used their mobile devices for work. This process revealed that that there was a number of staff in lower paying positions that use their mobile devices for work purposes. If PSESD had moved forward without talking with a broad range of individuals they may have missed important information and made decisions that were ill-founded and contributed to negative impacts on staff. The new Mobile Stipend Policy enacted in 2020 recognizes that regular full-time and part-time employees who hold positions or perform essential job functions were to be treated the same in terms of their stipend eligibility. This overturned the prior policy, in which executive staff had received a larger stipend.*

## 2016 | PSESD Influence on Special Education Services

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The PSESD special services staff supports directors in school district special education programs. The work we are doing sets out to help school district staff realize that there are more inequities than they are initially aware of, or thinking about.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Over time we have helped school district staff become more involved and cognizant of what is going on and more aware of the inequities that are being perpetuated. They are more aware of how they can plant seeds to promote positive change within their districts. Over time these efforts have resulted in an added emphasis on equity and on supporting all students and all learners. The work to bring about these changes started before 2016 and continues to gain more momentum.*

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We made sure that everyone had access to professional development that the agency offered, and also worked to align professional development more strongly with our approach and values.*

## 2016 | Adoption of the Transformation Team

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The formation of the Transformation Team has been instrumental because of the commitment of time and commitment of resources and was a specific, focused attempt to change accountability structures at the agency.



## 2016 | PSESD Professional Development Practices

**WHAT HAPPENED:** When we first started there were clear delineations between the special levels of professional development that the agency was putting together and who accessed certain types of training specifically the Puget Sound Leadership Academy (PSLA).

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Because of the adoption of the Transformation Team we were able to build the Strategic Direction Action Teams, and share decision making in significant areas such as the agency budget.*

### VALUE

Identify harm and act early on

### VALUE

Say something and mean it

### VALUE

Be active, not passive –  
stay in the conversation

### VALUE

Shift away from institutional power

## 2016-2020 | Transformational Values

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We are engaged in conversations focused on naming and prioritizing transformational values. This feels very different than other organizations.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** At the program level we are actually having open conversations about our intentional efforts to support our values with each other and other organizations. Our shared language is important. This work takes practice. We are on a continuum.



### 2016-2018 | Early Learning Re-Design Work

**WHAT HAPPENED:** When we rolled out the new early learning design and began to transition to put that design in place there were employees who were impacted and who were concerned and who were vocal. Part of that year we decided to lean in and understand their concerns. One of the things we learned from people was stories of how harm happened 20 years ago. Harm was as fresh as happened yesterday, even though some of the people who caused harm are no longer here.

VALUE  
Lean in to understand

VALUE  
Know where you are going

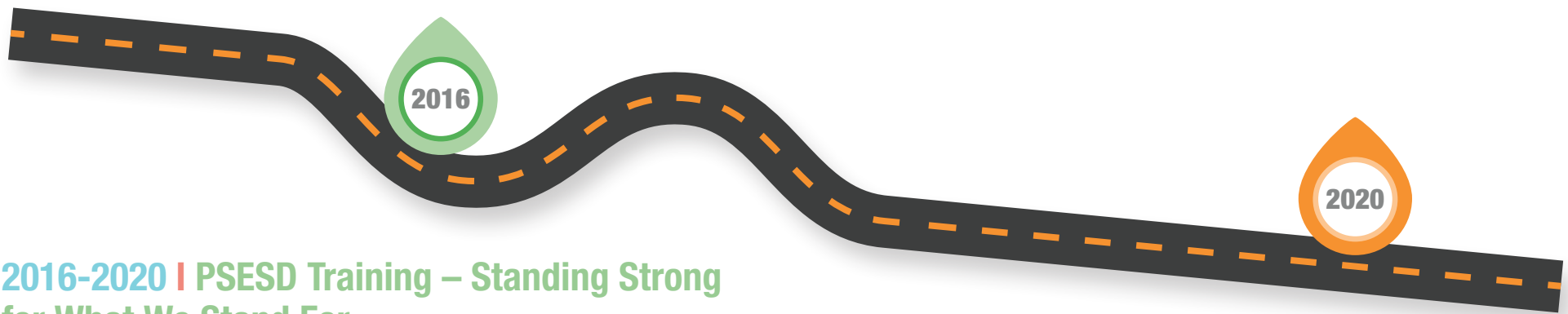
**WHAT SHIFTED:** One of our learnings was around addressing harm. It reminded us when you harm someone it is important to get on that early and not let it go unattended because it doesn't go away. The early learning work takes into account racial equity and justice – that whole effort was an important part of our agency's story. The new early learning organizational design integrated early learning with other PSESD departments, better positioning the agency to work collaboratively towards being an antiracist, multicultural organization.

### 2016 | SDAT 4 Strategic Direction Action Team Push Back on the Status Quo

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The SDAT 4 team pushed back on the status quo of how the PSESD does things and how we show up. It is about how we root our partnership in anti-racist practices. It is slow moving work. It is essential.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** We created our own culture and we didn't ask permission to do it. Our work and the impact of it are not limited to what happens at PSESD. It transcends that and helps to counter our institutional amnesia. The changes we are influencing will help all of us to stop forgetting what is done, and from starting over and making the same mistakes.

VALUE  
People need to be able to share honestly; addressing discomfort and conflict helps move us to deeper transformation



## 2016-2020 | PSESD Training – Standing Strong for What We Stand For

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We have invested in creating an environment where white privilege and white supremacy are openly discussed. Against this backdrop we stood up for our values when an organization came to us and said they wanted us to do a training for them where the content was on white supremacy and on unpacking and understanding white supremacy but they did not want to label the workshop with the title white supremacy. We had to stick to our values and make sure that this happened.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We came to the realization that we wouldn't want to provide external services without being truly transparent in aligning the work we do with our values. This event demonstrated our commitment and willingness to do what is needed. We helped support others to not be afraid of using particular language.*

### VALUE

It's important for information to be shared and connections to happen in a de-siloed and non-hierarchical way

## 2016-2020 | Staff Sharing and Challenging the Status Quo

**WHAT HAPPENED:** In different spaces, including caucusing, interracial dialogues, and staff meetings, staff, particularly BIPOC staff, are sharing their experiences and stories. They are also raising issues such as non-transparent decision making. Staff are addressing disagreement and conflict rather than trying to smooth it out. This includes a staff meeting that took place the day after the November 2016 presidential election.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Hearing BIPOC staff stories and experiences has moved white staff and opened their eyes. There are many organizations where you are supposed to keep things secret and you are competing for who are doing the best job. We are opening our transparency and BIPOC staff is a voice in these critical moments.*

### VALUE

Creating a sense of community is important so staff feel like they have interdependence with each other

## 2017 | Board Passage of Revised Racial Equity Policy

**WHAT HAPPENED:** It feels like big things happen at the PSESD when the Board finalizes things. That is not because of the Board, but rather because of the way our traditional white dominant culture frames the work.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *When the Board prioritized that there would be a change to the Racial Equity Policy and a formal adoption of it that was a change. Also, it was a big change because it impacted other policies the agency has. The adoption also allowed the Board to then accept the idea that potentially the “End” would be modified. Rather than just stating that there would be success for each child, now there was the addition that there would be success for each child and we were going to do this by leading with racial equity.*

inclusion and belonging. The perception was that human resources were a promoter of the system and forced equity in the applicant pool.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We are working more now with hiring managers. This change has elevated responsibility and commitment around ensuring racial equity in the hiring process. For us now, it doesn't feel like such a hard push by human resources. There is an expectation among hiring managers and an understanding if they don't have a diverse pool they will expand the recruitment to ensure that we have the best opportunity to expand it. We have seen great growth in our quarterly equity reports. It has been inspiring to see incremental progress in our efforts to ensure that we have eliminated barriers in the hiring process. This has included intentionally looking at educational requirements on job descriptions to make sure they are not arbitrary and definitely are tied to the requirement of the position. We know that people of color may not have had access to the same level of education historically and want to recognize and undo these types of inequities, by having different hiring processes. These actions make a difference. When job applicants look at our leadership and staff they see that PSESD is more than just a lip service promoter of racial equity – rather they see that we try to live what we say we stand for.*

## 2017 | PSESD Equitable Hiring Practices

**WHAT HAPPENED:** PSESD worked to promote equitable hiring practices. They embedded language in the convening process for interview panels to help panel members understand that they play a direct role in ensuring that they are aware of their biases and that they are directly engaged in supporting our efforts around equity,



2017

2017

## 2017 | Cultural Appropriation

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We were in a conference setting working with an external contractor who was providing Adaptive Leadership training. When looking forward on the agenda and PowerPoint we saw that contractors were going to be using leis in a non-honoring, disrespectful way. We wanted to stop that from happening. But it did anyway. When we saw what was going to happen we tried to intervene but were not successful. When the Executive Leadership Team, at the time called Cabinet, descended from the conference center all were wearing leis. We took the moment to talk about this problem and to share and educate and ask people not to wear the leis, and used this as an opportunity to learn and grow. The Superintendent shared verbally to the group why he was wearing the lei, which unfortunately compounded the problem. As a result a group of us decided to withdraw from the meeting and instead do a race-based caucus for the whole agency as some people might have been seen leaving the building wearing leis by others who were not in the Adaptive Leadership training. The caucus we held gave people a chance to reflect and talk about what had happened. The people of color caucus united to hear this feedback with the white caucus. The Superintendent was invited to listen to the feedback, which at times was difficult to hear and painful for staff to share. He then wrote a letter to all staff acknowledging what he did and shared what he had learned. During this process he consulted with the PSESD equity team to craft his response as he wanted to cause the least harm and to take responsibility and ownership for that.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *What is amazing is how many people responded after receiving this letter. Being able to hear a white superintendent take that responsibility and own his impact and share his learning was a significant part of the journey. He set an example for what others*

*should do when they know they have offended others and be accountable for their actions. Our journey created a spotlight for white fragility. This is what we are trying to stand for and do – but when we don't we know we will be called in, not called out. This also showed how organization investments in staff training pays off when you invest in people's skills, as I got to experience the benefits of great caucus facilitators.*

## 2017-ongoing | Criteria for Hiring Consultants

**WHAT HAPPENED:** When one of the PSESD consultants facilitated an Adaptive Learning training which caused harm PSESD found ourselves contemplating what we are looking for in a consultant. We also wondered whether we should continue working with this particular consultant. We concluded that to work with us consultants should be well versed in race and equity training and racial analysis, and need to be able to authentically demonstrate that these values are embedded in, and not just “add-ons” to their work. For this reason we expect prospective consultants to demonstrate those skills and competencies. We also invite them to take our two day foundational training in race.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The Adaptive Learning consultant we worked with at the training informed us that the learning experience they had at the training significantly impacted their own practices. We believe that the impact of this training went far beyond their own development as they were a well-known national firm and likely communicated the lessons they had learned with many others. We also changed our hiring practices and there are now questions around the racial equity hiring practices on the RFP, and opportunities for consultants to take the two day foundational training.*

## 2017-2020 | Equity Focused Fund Development

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The system is being put in place to track and demonstrate our work. This information is shared with funders and drives our work.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We are able to document with a large amount of our funding that our mission, our vision and our policies are tied to racial equity. This positions us to say we have made a decision collaboratively not to apply for certain grants that are not in line with our stated End. Having this documentation gives us more leverage and something to lean on in external conversations with funders and something potentially to teach funders about our approach. There is a significant growth in the types of grants that are being funded, and in the way that funders come to us to learn about how we work with community based organizations, school districts and families.*

2017

2020

## 2017-2020 | Educare Grow Your Own Staffing

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We have taken vital steps in our work to “grow our own” staff to ensure that the staff we have reflects the communities we serve. We take a systematic approach that includes strict adherence to racial equity embedded high quality teaching practices, professional development, intensive family support and data-driven decisions.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Our “grow your own” strategies are successful. Our staff is incredibly diverse and, speaks a total of 23 languages. Because of our internal promotional strategies, half of the supervisors in Educare are people of color and represent the children in the classroom. In 2020 we are focusing even more on creating pathways for staff to build their skills and get additional education.*

### PRACTICES

Reflect on, recognize and celebrate the incremental progress made on our journey to become an antiracist, multicultural organization

### PRACTICES

Examine where communities are advising and how they are impacted to make decisions and prioritize improvements

## 2018-2020 | Pathways to Change

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The Pathways to Change process was questioned by the K-12 Postsecondary people. This process did not resonate with the staff. Some asked, “Where did this come from? Who created it? How will it be used?”

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *There was a lovely moment, where there was a collective push back. This was good because it showed that people cared and were developing their own collective vision, and where they want to be. If they had not pushed back nobody would have cared about the outcome or the product.*

white supremacy and changed what was supposed to be the focus of the 2020 gathering. The influence of PSESD early learning has exceeded local boundaries, and infiltrated the national stage.

Our reputation and work opened the doors to our rewriting the initial training designed for the 2018 Build- High Quality Practices, and with the help of Silicon Valley Educare we had the training materials translated into multiple languages.



## 2018-2020 | Educare Community Network

**WHAT HAPPENED:** As an Educare early learning hub we have spoken ardently and often in an informed way about our antiracism work and how it has made a positive difference in the lives of children and families. Educare Seattle is known for its antiracism work, and we are often called upon to design and lead trainings which incorporate the strategies we have forged and tested.

We use our drive and resolve to influence others. As a partner in the Educare Community Network in 2019 we interrupted the National Conference because we knew we needed to talk about racism and

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We have advised other Educare sites and school districts on how to present their materials and presentations in language that is more equitable and respectful. Our parent leadership work has extended to other leadership opportunities including the Parent Ambassador program which now lives under the State Association of Head Start and ECEAP. As a major partner in that work we are continuing to promote its expansion through the Educare Learning Network. We are visible on the national stage. We were scheduled to be presenting at the New Orleans Educare conference March 2020. The focus, which we had earlier made a case for, will be on race, equity and children of color. Though COVID-19 has temporarily disrupted the schedule the work will be moving forward in virtual spaces in the near future and in person when we can safely meet again.*

### PRACTICES

Avoid acronyms, like ARMCO (Antiracist, Multicultural Organization) because they take away from the meaning and power of words

### PRACTICES

Organizational decision-making processes should take into account whether that decision is going to have an adverse or disproportionate influence on one group versus another

## 2018-2020 | Agency-wide Racial Equity Competencies

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We spent a lot of time in abstract land thinking about agency wide competencies. Talking about values and things that were hard to put hands around. We asked ourselves: How do I know I am doing this? How do I know we are doing this together? The agency adopted and piloted racial equity competencies for staff to develop and increase their engagement in antiracist leadership practices.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Having these competencies in place solidified that staff have the agency's support, that if they step into controversy they are supported. Staff then felt more comfortable raising issues and having racial equity conversations internally and externally. Seeing shifts in the level of conversations we are having in our day to day work. The beauty of these agency wide competencies was that it was an organizational endeavor – everyone- a group coming together to think of what these antiracist leadership practices that we would hold ourselves accountable to. We had ways of thinking what we would want it to be – now we had words to describe what it looks like. It was huge, seeing shifts in the level of conversations we are having deepening in support of racial justice. We are in these conversations in our day to day work.*

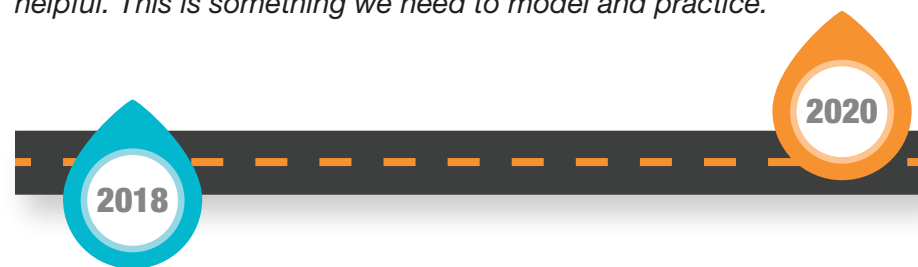
### PRACTICES

Provide ongoing coaching and development and antiracist leadership training to promote staff accountability

## 2018-2020 | Leadership Taking Accountability

**WHAT HAPPENED:** At the PSESD the practice of taking responsibility for actions is regarded as important, as well as taking ownership and responsibilities for mistakes. It says a lot about how people make mistakes, take feedback and push ahead. There have been a few moments where leadership has taken responsibility for mistakes they have made.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We are all members of teams where we have opportunities to own our mistakes. Seeing our leadership do this is helpful. This is something we need to model and practice.*



## 2018-2020 | Strong Person of Color Leadership

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Having a strong person of color who is helping to shape the culture of the organization has been extremely beneficial.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Strong leadership has focused attention on shaping the culture of K-12 to postsecondary, and helped inspire staff associated with other programs to focus on the expectations, activities and principles that guide the culture of the agency.*

### PRACTICES

Create space and opportunities for PSESD staff who work off site to connect to each other, and to the organization's journey

2018

## 2018-2020 | Changing Statewide Systems – State Board of Community Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and Office of Superintendent Public Instruction (OSPI)

**WHAT HAPPENED:** PSESD has been working with community colleges and school districts to promote linkages between pre-K, K-12, and postsecondary partners. We know that as part of this work we all need to be talking the same way about racial equity and what that looks like along this path, and have been working with our college and K-12 partners on trainings to promote this effort. We have seen that our work is making a difference in these systems and feel that it is having a far reaching effect. Before we began this work, the community college system was not discussing terms such as racial equity and white supremacy. We are trying to embed race equity language, practices and policies into our ongoing discussions and trainings with them. Ripple effects from our efforts are emerging.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *PSESD got the Washington State college system to engage in an end that was based on racial equity. This is a huge system effect, resulting to a large extent from our work. Many colleges are now engaged in race equity training. Today, both OSPI and SBCTC are talking about becoming an antiracist, multicultural organization and leading with racial equity. To hear this aim being expressed is significant, and to no small degree attributable to our fingertips being engaged in many different service systems and venues. We suspect the ripple effects of this work may develop into waves, as the numbers of people and places engaged in this journey will increase over time.*

2019

## 2019 | Multilingual Workgroup

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The PSESD is working with a group of representatives, including teachers and English Learner Specialists from different school districts. This is a language workgroup that is striving to create recommendations for PSESD and statewide school districts. The work has shined a spotlight on the importance and ways that we use to describe multilingual students, and has underscored how our language shapes our actions and ultimately effects how multilingual students are treated and served in school. The PSESD staff person who was facilitating this effort saw firsthand the power of having community members lead the work. This was particularly beneficial to this person, as they were recently employed at the PSESD and getting grounded in the most effective strategies to truly engage and learn from the community. The community members who participated in this work were passionate and dedicated. Even though they were getting ready for the new school year, and coping with COVID-19 related complications they showed up and brought their experiences as bilingual or multilingual community members to inform the work.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The community members have attended multiple meetings. The PSESD was a helper in this work – while the community was the shaper. This demonstrated to the PSESD staff person how and why community-led and informed strategies were foundational components of the racial equity work of the PSESD. She learned, accordingly, how to reframe her own role in this work, and witnessed the benefits of being flexible, and of creating an environment which embraces community input, and is open to learning and taking direction from community members.*

2020

## 2019 | Board Retreat White Fragility Discussion

**WHAT HAPPENED:** It was during the 2019 Board retreat conversations around White Fragility. In one moment all the people of color were deflated. It was – who is going to talk about this? Does it have to be the people of color? Are White people going to say anything? The Transformation Team was the voice of the agency. I didn't know how to cultivate it in a way to be seen as the voice as well as mutual accountability with ELT and the Board.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The shift part was when I went in front of the Board- and that moment in front of the Board- it was so many people speaking about it and about what mutual accountability was and there was a bit of work done in the back and as well that the Board brought me up to do this- and felt that was the shift. It was no longer an ask, but let's do.*

*Some board members felt that leading with racial equity was a good thing to say and it felt like there was a little bit of shift. It felt different than the thing to say. Saying it and meaning it.*

*I remember that moment. Oh so this is real- for real. For me that was a shift away from institutional power operating in the same way you work with, or defer to a board, to really leading in and striving to what we call our north star.*

## December 2019 | Passages of Revised Racial Equity Policy and Land Acknowledgment Policy

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The PSESD 2019 Board retreat and what staff shared made it personal and changed the dynamic and was pivotal. Also, one of the other pivotal moments was the December 2019 and the 2019 passages of racial equity policy and land acknowledgment policy.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *When we think of it that was four months after the summer 2019 Board Retreat when other Board members moved from being skeptical to being huge advocates of racial equity – it felt very different.*



### PRACTICES

Reflect and act on community feedback

### PRACTICES

Create opportunities for administrative staff to connect, share information, and validate their work

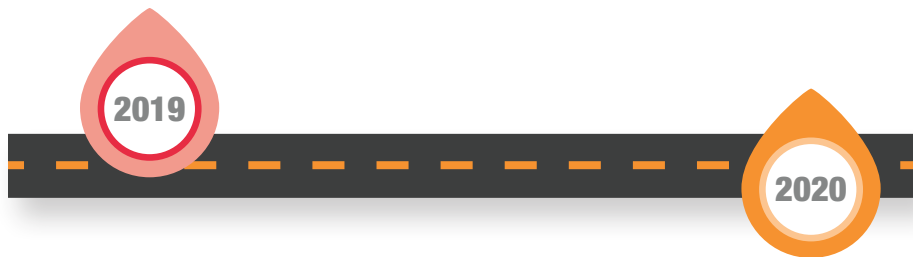
### PRACTICES

Engage, reach out and make space for diverse community members in leadership positions

## 2019-2020 | PSESD Board Recruitment

**WHAT HAPPENED:** When a white PSESD Board member reached out to a person of color who was a parent and community member and asked, “I was wondering if you might be interested in running for my board position” the individual said, “Let me think about it and get back to you?”

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *The above encouragement and invitation was described as a critical moment by the community member because she saw it as an indication that the Board member wanted to step aside in order to move this organization forward to becoming an antiracist, multicultural organization. Notably, it also underscored her commitment, as she applied for a Board position.*



### PRACTICES

Require sub-contractors to demonstrate their race equity awareness and commitment

### PRACTICES

Engage multiple people in conversations and decision-making

## 2019 | Caucuses, Interracial Dialogues and Affinity Groups

**WHAT HAPPENED:** PSESD had caucusing strategies where there was a white caucus and a people of color caucus. For some people of color this strategy didn't feel right because they knew there were two processes underway; wherein the people of color were sharing intense and emotional stories, and the white people appeared to be participating in more lighthearted conversations. The expectation was that the caucuses would meet separately and then be combined. To some people of color this approach didn't make sense, and prompted the question, “How are we supposed to move forward together as an organization if we are meeting separately?” Many Black staff stopped going to the caucuses. When encouraged back, some engaged in discussions that focused on developing a new framework for meetings.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We started talking about doing interracial dialogues, and having actual conversations together. This was regarded as especially important, because the white staff would hear the stories and experiences shared by people of color. The Interracial Dialogues that were held after George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor were killed were identified as intense and meaningful. People shared what they were feeling and experiencing. There was a lot of goodness that came out of the pain. Another recent related shift includes the launching of affinity groups as the people of color didn't like being lumped into one group but do like having a space where they can come together, for example, by having separate Black and Asian groups.*

### PRACTICES

Have equity data to lean on for external conversations with funders

### PRACTICES

Ensure professional development opportunities are not restrictive

## 2020 | Transformation Collaborative

**WHAT HAPPENED:** The direction we wrote has informed other work underway including the recently formed Transformation Collaborative. Again, we learned that we needed to remind others of practices that need to be implemented in order to engage and work with the community. We need to retain, and not continually resurrect, our past lessons. We need to not forget.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *There is another layer of modeling going on now in the Transformation Collaborative where parents and community members are involved in the work, and in what we are calling a representative advisory council. Notably, again, the formation of this council came in late, but it is there now. We are hoping that eventually all the right components will be embedded in the culture of the PSESD so that the work is centered in the community, in service of the community. We are hoping that these components will be modeled by the PSESD. We know that our pushing back on the PSESD is another really crucial layer of additional work that we are prepared to do. We have been working on a framework that is in the process of coming out, and which should inform how we partner and how we root our partnership and practices in anti-racism practices.*

## 2020 | Race Equity Conversations

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Maybe this is a snapshot in time. It is related to a response to the George Floyd murder and how that impacted interracial dialogues that directly followed and how we gave space for people to process and share. We convened learning and teaching central office people once a week during the COVID-19 time. At the first meeting we threw out the planned agenda and opened up space to talk and process, and whatever was happening in the country, and recognizing and reckoning 400 years of history. An email went out about this.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *Central office leaders are taking conversations back to their respective districts and continuing them. The Executive Director of K-Postsecondary took that email and modified that and shared with groups she was convening and OSPI colleagues and others using that same email are also sharing out.*



2020

### PRACTICES

Collect and share data that provides clear evidence of the need for, and benefits of racial equity focused work

### PRACTICES

Use shared language and engage in transparent conversations

### PRACTICES

All new staff should attend two days of foundation training

## 2020 | Creating Space for PSESD Staff to Connect and Reflect

**WHAT HAPPENED:** Support Staff, including Executive Assistants, Administrative Staff Specialists and Program Coordinators play a vital role at PSESD. They appreciated the opportunity to meet as a group in a setting where they could build community, share knowledge, uplift each other and celebrate their work. This was very validating for those involved. Staff in these positions are vital to the journey PSESD is taking, but are not always recognized for the crucial role they play.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We changed our job description to be more modern and less “Mad Men”, and changed the wording to be more empowering, accurate, and reflective of the work we do. We know our work is important to PSESD’s journey to becoming an antiracist multicultural organization.*

## 2020 | Racial Equity Focus of Educational Service Districts (ESDs)

**WHAT HAPPENED:** We met with eight Educational Service Districts on financial development and for the first time they expressed an interest in focusing on racial equity. In the past they had focused on equity issues, but not on racial equity.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *We were explicitly asked to share resources and tools about racial equity in our monthly meetings. This is a shift and one that could have statewide impact in the areas which their ESD serves.*

## 2020 | PSESD Departmental De-siloing Efforts

**WHAT HAPPENED:** There have been ongoing attempts to make connections among departments and programs in Learning, Teaching and Family Support, and these connections are being built organically now.

**WHAT SHIFTED:** *There used to be efforts to de-silo but they were artificial and weren’t embedded in staff’s work. Staff talked about current collaborations that come organically from staff to share resources and connections. No one in a larger agency capacity is taking the lead on the collaboration work. Staff sees the urgency of the work and wants to prioritize it.*

### PRACTICES

The right components must be in place for the PSESD to declare and model how their work is centered in community

### PRACTICES

The relationships and connections and centering of racial equity work on the front burner, and constant stirring of that pot helps us get the movement we seek

## Board Interviews

Several of the above Critical Moments topics reference the PSESD Board, underscoring the important role that the PSESD Board plays. Interviews with six of the nine PSESD Board members reveal that PSESD's journey to become an antiracist multicultural organization is important and highly valued. The interviews also demonstrate that board members have a deep interest in learning more about the results of the work that PSESD does to eliminate opportunity gaps. Specifically, they want to explore in more detail how these results are connected to PSESD's Pathways to Change. Board members asked, for example, how PSESD is influencing student achievement outcomes, and the antiracist actions of other school districts or boards. One board member wondered if, and how PSESD's strategic priorities were data-driven and focused on areas where academic performance inequities are the greatest. There was also a strong interest in focusing board attention on targeted interventions, such as kindergarten readiness or academic improvement initiatives focused on Native Americans or refugees and immigrants. As a member of a policy board, there seemed to be a certain level of frustration on the part of some members at being distant from hearing about the work on the ground, and a passion to learn more about it. It is clear that some board members believed that by having more of a bird's eye view of this work, and seeing how PSESD is making a dent in

eliminating academic opportunity gaps, their policy work would be better informed, more productive and meaningful.

One board member also noted that the PSESD work on racial equity helped him to better understand what it means to have prejudice or bias, how these systems are perpetuated and how little he understand how they impact people who don't look like him. He posed the question: How do I make change happen? He thought he could follow up by speaking up when these issues came up with people who know him, where (he hopes) he has credibility, such as work, with family or friends. Also, as a person with a disability, he said this has given him a greater appreciation for what it is like to not be part of the dominant culture.

Board member questions about the "impact and influence of PSESD" dovetailed with some of the topics emerging from the Critical Moments workgroups. Future Critical Moments sessions may want to include the routine collection of Critical Moments information from Board members as well as PSESD staff. To date, the work underway paints a compelling picture of how and where the actions and interactions of both groups are instrumental to PSESD's journey.

### PRACTICES

Look at educational requirements on job descriptions to make sure they aren't arbitrary and are tied to the requirements of a job

### PRACTICES

Create open and adaptive spaces for staff to share, and center their work on children and families is important

## 3 Next Steps

The gift of recollections is a powerful force for telling the story of individuals who are involved in different parts of a journey, and for informing newcomers of the path on which they are now embarking. This is a living document that is meant to be revisited and updated. PSESD staff may want to periodically review, reaffirm, and/or add to the values and examples of practices associated with their journey. Documents which embed recollections have the potential to serve as a resource for all who are interested in learning more about the journey that the PSESD is taking. They can be coupled with the more formal materials that PSESD regards as “Identity” documents. PSESD is in the process of developing a plan for engaging additional staff in the Critical Moments sessions.

### PRACTICES

Strive to name and combat in everyday work the dynamics that racism perpetuates

### PRACTICES

Combat processes that mirror white supremacy

### PRACTICES

Develop a workforce that mirrors the community

### PRACTICES

Promote collective facilitation

### PRACTICES

Get buy-in from human resource managers to support equitable hiring practices

### PRACTICES

Invest in staff caucusing and leadership skills

### PRACTICES

Engage all staff in Transformation Team processes and decisions

### PRACTICES

Stand up with districts and others to talk about racial equity

## PSESD Critical Moments Reflection Participants

Summer/Fall 2020

The following people participated in Critical Moments Reflection sessions.

| GROUP NAME                       | GROUP DESCRIPTION   | PARTICIPANTS   |  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Executive Leadership Team</b> | The Executive Leadership Team is responsible for PSESD progressing toward its End, Success for Each Child and Close the Opportunity Gap by Leading with Racial Equity   | Denise Altheimer<br>Brad Brown<br>Jessica de Barros<br>Clairmonte Cappelle<br>Kay Lancaster<br>Amber McCulloch | Felis Peralta<br>Julie Rolling<br>Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg<br>Joli Valentino<br>John P. Welch            |
| <b>PSESD Board of Directors</b>  | The Puget Sound Educational Service District Board of Directors is comprised of nine elected members representing school districts across King and Pierce counties and Bainbridge Island. Our Superintendent, John Welch, is a member of the Board and serves as the Secretary. | Dr. Someireh Amirfaiz<br>Greg Bawden<br>Dr. Barbara Peterson   | Jordan Posamentier<br>Joanne Seng<br>Marcella V. Tomlin  |
| <b>SDAT 2</b>                    | Purpose: PSESD will identify and create opportunities to cultivate a racially diverse and antiracist workplace that allows PSESD to serve as the model of a diverse and Antiracist Multicultural Organization that its partners may strive to emulate.                          | Denise Altheimer<br>Jeannette Belaski<br>Maxine Broussard-Upchurch<br>Isabel Callaway<br>Clairmonte Cappelle   | Denyse Guthrie<br>Hilary Loeb<br>Michelle Morse<br>Lauren Okano<br>Allyssa Zillmer                         |
| <b>SDAT 3</b>                    | Purpose: PSESD will provide catalytic leadership with educational partners that respectfully but firmly and persistently accelerates the implementation of antiracist, gap-closing policies and practices   | Cheryl Lydon<br>Laura Matson   |  |
| <b>SDAT 4</b>                    | Purpose: PSESD acknowledges power imbalances that perpetuate inequities. We are committed to addressing this by centering power within students, families, and communities. All PSESD relationships and partnerships are rooted in anti-racism practices.                       | Carlina Brown-Banks<br>David Corby<br>Regina Elmi<br>Immaculate Ferreria<br>Gloria Fortune<br>Téa Fortune      | Matthew Gulbranson<br>Sonja Lennox<br>Shereese Rhodes<br>Abby Smith<br>Megan Streeter<br>Karina Vanderbilt |

| GROUP NAME                 | GROUP DESCRIPTION   | PARTICIPANTS   |  |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>SDAT 5</b>              | Purpose: PSESD commits to developing and implementing structures, functions, and processes to ensure mutual accountability with our transformational relationships.   | LaTanya Brooks<br>Kyla Lackie<br>Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg  | Carolyn Solitaire<br>Anna Wade   |
| <b>Transformation Team</b> | Established in 2016, the Transformation Team is a collective of PSESD staff, community members and parents charged with guiding the agency towards becoming an Antiracist Multicultural Organization by overseeing and evaluating the implementation of the Racial Equity Policy No. 1010. This team is integral in assisting the agency in eliminating opportunity gaps. | Greta Bornemann<br>Maxine Broussard-Upchurch<br>Dior Davenport<br>Monique Harrison<br>Heather Kawamoto<br>Aeryn King<br>Amy Meiser<br>Michelle Morse | Felis Peralta<br>Lori Pittman<br>Julie Rolling<br>Sarita Siqueiros Thornburg<br>Carolyn Solitaire<br>Joli Valentino<br>Allyssa Zillmer |



## BUSINESS GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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Email: bgcc1@comcast.net



### PRACTICES

Promote collective leadership

### PRACTICES

Assess how we are using competencies to support the work we are doing on behalf of students and families

### PRACTICES

Select and use consultants that mirror PSESD values, technical skills are not enough