Operating Policy No. 5515

Human Resources

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

The Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) is committed to preventing and addressing secondary traumatic stress for staff by supporting mental health in the workplace. Staff may work with students experiencing trauma and loss. As a result, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff may experience secondary traumatic stress. Ensuring the wellbeing of staff is a critical component to sustaining an effective work environment and promoting student outcomes.

The PSESD Whole Health Committee exists to establish a multi-culture of wellness that inspires and empowers individuals to enhance their personal health and wellbeing. The committee is comprised of two sub-committees:

1. Benefits Committee - exists to review and recommend health and wellness benefits
2. Wellness Committee - exists to promote information and activities that improve and support the physical and mental well-being of PSESD staff.

In addition, the duties of the Wellness Committee include:

* Sharing secondary traumatic stress, stress management, and other mental health [resources and supports](https://pugetsoundesd.sharepoint.com/my/hr/benefits-online/SitePages/Secondary-Traumatic-Stress-Resources.aspx) available through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Educational Service District, and the School Employees' Benefits Board; and
* Sharing links to a secondary traumatic stress self-assessment tool and any associated resources.

Working in collaboration with others, the Whole Health Committee Chair will regularly assess agency-level implementation of this policy. The assessment may include input from PSESD staff. Utilizing the data collected, report to the Executive Director of Human Resources & Organizational Development, a summary of committee activities, the status of staff well-being, and recommendations for the implementation of this policy.

PSESD will also provide appropriate resources and training to schools and staff for continuous improvement.

**Definitions**

**Secondary Traumatic Stress**  
Secondary traumatic stress, also called compassion fatigue, is a natural but disruptive set of symptoms that may result when one person learns first-hand of the traumatic experiences of another. Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress may include feelings of isolation, anxiety, dissociation, physical ailments, and sleep disturbances. In addition, those affected by secondary traumatic stress may experience: changes in memory and perception; alterations in their sense of self-efficacy; a depletion of personal resources; and disruption in their perceptions of safety, trust, and independence.

Adopted: August 2021

Relevant PSESD Board Governance Policies: EL 4 Treatment of Staff

Cross References: Operating Policy No. 1000 Nondiscrimination

Operating Policy No. 1010 Racial Equity

Legal References: 28A.300 RCW Superintendent of Public Instruction

28A.400 RCW Employees