

2014-15 Self-Assessment Process and Results

Overview of the Self-Assessment Process

Continuous quality improvement is a central tenet of the PSESD Early Learning program, with the goal of meeting Head Start, Early Head Start Performance and Program Standards, eliminating the Opportunity Gap and moving toward program excellence for serving and educating children and families throughout the region. Each year, PSESD conducts a comprehensive Self-Assessment to identify compliance with federal regulations and progress on program goals and objectives. The process of Self-Assessment is an essential component of the continuous improvement cycle.

Step 1: Preparing the Self-Assessment

In fall 2014 and winter 2015, a Continuous Improvement & Self-Assessment Taskforce¹ met several times to plan the Self-Assessment process and to validate how Self-Assessment aligns with and serves the purpose of Continuous Improvement. This year, Self-Assessment covered 10 topics within the three Early Learning Program priorities—[1] Opportunity Gap/Racial Equity; [2] High Quality Services Supported by High Quality Systems; and [3] School Readiness—and the long-term goals within those priorities. Site staff and leaders, parents/families, and Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) staff were asked to provide input through focus groups and surveys. The survey and focus group questions on the 10 topic areas were planned and developed over several months with input from program leadership, staff, subcontractors, and parents. The questions were developed to elicit specific information that are further described in Step 3.

Program staff and families provided input on are:

- 1) Family Goal-Setting
- 2) Family Engagement
- 3) Healthy Habits
- 4) Child Attendance
- 5) School Readiness Goal-Setting
- 6) Teaching and Curriculum
- 7) Policy Council/Governance
- 8) PSESD Early Learning Program Communication

In addition, program staff were asked for feedback on the following:

- 9) Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework
- 10) Monitoring and Planning Processes

¹ The Taskforce is comprised of PSESD Early Learning Program leaders and staff, Center Directors, and parents, and was facilitated by partners from the BERK Consulting Group.

Step 2: Collecting the Information, Assessing Head Start and Early Head Start Program Progress/ **Collecting Staff and Family Input**

The methodology used stacked a broad-reaching survey and regional discussion groups with an in-depth purposeful sample of sites to meet the majority of information needs. The objective of a population-wide survey and regional discussion groups was to collect data from across all PSESD sites. This combination of approaches ensures all stakeholders have access to a means of input to the self-assessment.

SURVEYS: Four population-wide survey instruments were developed for the 2014-15 Self-Assessment and in April until early May 2015 **parents/family members, site staff, center directors, and PSESD Early Learning Program staff** were invited to complete the survey version that was applicable to them. All surveys were available online; and for parents/family members, English and Spanish versions of their survey were made available in printed form too. In total, there were 264 site staff, 50 center leaders, 81 PSESD staff, and 649 parents/family members who completed the Self-Assessment survey.

FOCUS GROUPS: From late March through April 2015, there were 15 focus groups that were conducted for site staff and center leadership, and 11 focus groups that were conducted for parents and family members. Regional focus group discussions were held at the PSESD in Renton and at the STAR Center in Tacoma. Six site-specific focus groups were held across the region. Altogether, there were 115 site staff and leaders and 74 parents and family members who participated in the various focus groups that were held. Finally, four *targeted-informant* focus groups were conducted with Policy Council representatives at their meeting on April 28.

Step 3: Analysis/ Analyzing and Reporting Staff and Family Input

There were two types of input that were gathered through the surveys and focus groups. Most of the survey responses, based on a 5-point rating scale (i.e., extremely, very, somewhat, slightly, and not at all), are summarized and reported using percentages and counts.

- Results are reported as strengths if 67% or more of respondents provided a moderately positive rating response to survey questions (e.g., somewhat involved; somewhat capable; somewhat helpful; somewhat effective).
- Results are categorized as challenges if less than 67% of respondents gave positive rating responses; or, at least 33% of survey participants indicated negative rating responses (e.g., slightly involved; slightly helpful; slightly effective; somewhat challenging; not helpful at all; not capable at all).

The other type of responses are gathered from the open-ended survey questions and during the focus groups discussions. These responses are best described and summarized according to the main ideas or themes that are reflected in them. Themes are included in the report when:

- A similar statement or comment was made in 2 or more focus groups, and where other people in the group agreed with the speaker; and/or
- A similar response to an open-ended survey question was provided by two or more people out of every 10 survey respondents.

Results have been presented to Policy Council, Center/Site Leadership, PSESD Leadership, and PSESD site staff in different meetings. These different stakeholders provided input on possible strategies that either support/continue enabling identified program strengths or address challenges or barriers that hinder progress. Self-Assessment results and Self-Assessment Improvement Plan are being presented to the Board of Directors for communication and approval in summer of 2015.

To assess the state of the PSESD Early Learning Program, questions associated with each of the ten topic areas listed above were developed to serve as guideposts for quantitative and qualitative information² to be gathered from various program stakeholders. The following section is a summary of strengths and challenges that address the framing questions in each topic area.

- 1) **Family Goal-Setting:** *Have parents set at least one goal for their family? What early learning program supports have families experienced in making progress toward those goals? Which have been helpful and which not helpful?*
 - 88% of **parents/family members** found the process for setting specific and achievable family goals very or extremely helpful. And 94% reported that their families are either making progress toward their goals or have met them. Although many parents identified their children’s school readiness goals as their family goals, they also identified goals that were applicable to them (e.g., applying for a job; obtaining a GED).
 - More than 90% of **site staff** and 88% of **center leaders** felt somewhat, very, or extremely capable in supporting families in setting specific and achievable family goals. **Parents and family members** expressed appreciation for family support staff, home visitor, and teacher help in setting and achieving goals. The provision of specific resources, consistent guidance, and follow-up support, especially in that family’s language, were identified as particularly helpful.
 - **HOWEVER:** 37% of **PSESD program staff** reported that they found supporting sites in working with families to set specific and achievable family goals at least somewhat challenging. **Site staff and center leadership** cited lack of time and resources (e.g., computers; updated sources for community resources) as challenges to be addressed. They also mentioned the need for better-sharing/better-communication of family-goals setting information between family-support staff and teachers. **Parents** mentioned work schedules and illness in the family as barriers to engaging in the process of setting and achieving family goals.
- 2) **Family Engagement:** *Are staff competent and knowledgeable in working successfully with all families across different cultural groups? In what areas do staff feel they need more training to better engage parents? What skills do parents think staff need to improve to better engage parents? What is the extent to which parent/family events are helpful to families in (a) Supporting school readiness for their children, (b) Making progress toward their goals, (c) Learning about transitions and preparing for K-12, and (d) Connecting with peers. What are characteristics of parent/family events that have been beneficial in achieving those goals?*
 - 88% of **site staff who identify as persons of color** and 75% of site staff who do not assessed themselves as very or extremely effective in working with children and families *across different racial and cultural groups*. At the same time, 88% of **site staff who speak a language other than English** and 85% of site staff who do not deemed themselves at least somewhat effective in working with children and families *who speak a language other than English*.
 - 84% of **parents and family members who identify as persons of color** and 79% of parents and families who do not rated site staff as very or extremely effective in working with children and families *across different races and cultures*. And 78% of **parents and families**

² The list of information needs was generated through discussions with the Continuous Improvement Task Force, PSESD Administrative Staff, and external expert review.

- who speak a language other than English** rated site staff as either very or extremely effective in working with children and families *who speak a language other than English*.³
- **Parents/family members** who attended at least one parent/family event rated parent/family events as either very or extremely helpful in supporting parents/family to: [1] Prepare their children for school, including transition to kindergarten for preschool children, or to preschool for Early Head Start children (85%); [2] Learn about community resources (80%); [3] Make progress towards family goals (79%); [4] Meet and get to know other parents/families (75%); [5] Participate in peer learning opportunities such as teach-backs, etc. (73%).
 - **HOWEVER:** Supporting site staff and center leaders to work effectively with *children and families across racial and cultural groups* and with *children and families who speak a language other than English* is at least somewhat challenging, according to 37% and 44%, respectively, of **PSESD program staff**. **All stakeholders**—parents, site staff, center directors, and PSESD program staff—pointed to inconsistent access to interpreters. **Early Learning Program leaders and staff** identified lack of clarity and guidance on obtaining greater and more consistent access to Bilingual Instructional Assistants (BIAs) and translation services for the classrooms. **Program staff and leaders** also identified the need for cultural responsiveness/cultural competencies training or coaching as well as training in strategies/approaches to supporting dual language learners. Finally, **all stakeholders** acknowledged the lack of site staff who are reflective of the diversity of race, culture, and language of the children and families served.
- 3) **Healthy Habits:** *What are site staff and leaders' knowledge and supports related to the Healthy Habits initiative? What is parents'/families' experience with sites promoting culturally responsive healthy habits?*
- 84% of **site staff** and 68% of **center leaders** know about the 5-2-1-0 campaign⁴ to support healthy choices. 80% of **PSESD program staff** are familiar with the program's focus on healthy choices including the 5-2-1-0 campaign and 74% of the group thought that the Puget Sound ESD training and support to promote the initiative was at least somewhat helpful.
 - 82% of **parents** who know about the 5-2-1-0 campaign report that their families eat more fruits and vegetables.
 - **HOWEVER:** Only 36% of **site staff** who know about the 5-2-1-0 campaign reported being only slightly involved or not involved at all in promoting the campaign because they were not clear about expectations regarding their role in promoting 5-2-1-0. They stated that they either had received only one or no training at all; or they lacked materials to use and share with families easily. Moreover, 41% of **site staff** who know about the 5-2-1-0 campaign rated the support they received from their center leadership in promoting Healthy Choices/5-2-1-0 with children and families as only slightly or not at all helpful. Likewise, only 44% of **site staff** said that PSESD support also was only slightly or not at all helpful. Meanwhile, only 45% of **PSESD program staff** reported being only slightly involved or not at all involved in promoting Healthy Choices/5-2-1-0. At the same time, 53% of **parents** said that they did not know or were not sure what the 5-2-1-0 campaign is. And even for those who said that they knew about the campaign, only 54% to 58% of **parents** indicated some

³ 55% of parents and families who do not speak a language other than English were able to rate site staff as at least somewhat effective in working with children and families who speak a language other than English. This proportion falls under the threshold set (i.e., 67%) for identification as a program strength.

⁴ The 5-2-1-0 campaign refers to healthy habits that include having 5 servings of fruits and vegetables; 2 hours or less of screen time; 1 hour of physical activity; and 0 sugary drinks daily.

positive change in amount of screen time and physical activity or intake of sugary drinks for their families.

- 4) **Child Attendance:** *What are current strategies to support regular attendance? Which are and aren't effective? What is current level of staff knowledge about the 90% Average Daily Attendance minimum requirement? What training or supports are needed to help staff meet the requirement?*
- 71% of **parents** reported that site staff contact them when their child does not attend school (center-based programs) or when they miss a home visit or playgroup (home-based). 67% of parents cited 'phone calls' as a very helpful support from staff. Moreover, parents appreciated when transportation (e.g., school bus) is provided or tips are shared on preventing illness during the flu season or how to stop lice infestation, for example. They also appreciated that staff demonstrate compassion and understanding of a family's difficulties.
 - 91% of **center leaders** and 79% of **PSESD program staff** are aware that the PSESD Early Learning Program adopted *90% minimum average daily attendance* in the 2014-15 school year.
 - **HOWEVER:** 37% of **site staff** were not aware or indicated that they were not sure that the Early Learning Program has adopted *90% minimum average daily attendance* in school year 2014-15. **Site staff and center leads** were not clear about the reasons behind the increase in the minimum average daily attendance requirement. They worried that the new minimum creates a new hurdle for families who are grappling with multiple issues including lack of transportation, homelessness, long work schedules, etc. Many **parents** mentioned lack of transportation and financial limitations (e.g., lack of money for gas or bus fare) as factors that impact children's attendance. **Site/center staff and parents** indicated a need for better understanding of the importance of attendance (e.g., through data that demonstrate impact of absence on immediate and long-term learning) and a better definition of absence for the different service models (e.g., full-day versus part-day). Furthermore, **site/center and PSESD staff** identified the need for cross-service area training on how to access data to support work with staff/parents to address chronic absence and its links to school readiness and healthy habits, for example.
- 5) **School Readiness Goal-Setting:** *Have parents participated in setting school readiness goals for their child, and if so, have they also participated in monitoring progress toward these goals?*
- 92% of **parents/family members** reported that they worked with their child's teacher/home visitor to develop school readiness goals for their child and that they communicate with their child's teacher about their child's progress towards their school readiness goals at least once every 2-3 months. And among this group of parents, 94% rated the process or working with their child's teacher/home visitor as very or extremely helpful. Parents mentioned that they were grateful learning about what their child does well and what the child needs to improve on and how they can reinforce the strengths and help their children improve on skills. They appreciated the resources, ideas, practice materials, homework, and activities to do especially over the summer months that were provided them by teachers and family advocate/family support specialists.
 - **HOWEVER: Parents** thought that the process could be improved if they could receive even more frequent updates about their children's progress (e.g., daily or weekly written reports on goals and achievements) and if home-visiting time can be spent on less paperwork and more kindergarten-readiness conversations.
- 6) **Teaching and Curriculum:** *Do parents feel the services they receive are individualized to their children (including for children with disabilities) and their family? How has the current curriculum*

and teaching been effective? How could it be more effective? Do site staff think that they are receiving appropriate and sufficient training to implement the curriculum with fidelity?

- 87% of all **parents** rated both the teaching in their children’s classrooms or activities with home visitors in preparing their children for school and the services provided for meeting/accommodating their children’s individual needs as very or extremely effective. At the same time, 86% of **parents with children with a diagnosed disability** rated services provided as either very or extremely effective. Parents noted how teachers knew each child and keep track of goals for each one and they are at different levels. Parents appreciated the new literacy skills that their children are gaining; how children are learning to follow rules; and ways that their children learn how to express their feelings.
- 81% of **center leads**, 86% of **site staff**, and 88% of **PSESD program staff** rated the *Second Step Curriculum* as at least somewhat effective in meeting children’s individual needs to prepare them for school. 76% of **center leaders**, 85% of **PSESD staff**, and 93% of **site staff** deemed *Creative Curriculum* as at least somewhat effective in meeting children’s individual needs to prepare them for school. Six of 7 **site staff** who use *Partners for a Healthy Baby Curriculum* report using it to engage families in meeting their children’s school readiness goals.
- **HOWEVER:** Only 52% of all **parents** indicated that they have shared the individual interests and needs of their children and only 19% reported that they have given suggestions about classroom lessons/curriculum or home visit activities. Among **parents with children with a diagnosed disability**, although about 59% have shared the individual interests and needs of their children and 22% reported that they have given suggestions about classroom lessons/curriculum or home visit activities with their children with disabilities. **Site staff and center leaders** identified time, turnover, and training issues that impact the implementation of any curriculum. In particular, staff feel that they do not have education or enough training/support to meet the requirements of students with special needs, and also of dual-language learners. Teacher turnover is also an issue due to the need for start-up with curriculum implementation with new staff and not enough seasoned teachers are around. **Site and PSESD program staff** pointed out the need for *group training* and **center leads** cited *individual coaching* from PSESD as the support needed to increase overall capacity for implementing various curricula.

7) **Policy Council/Governance:** *Which communication strategies/structures are working well and what could be improved in the feedback loop between parents/families, Policy Council members, sites, and PSESD? Do parents have a baseline understanding of the PSESD Early Learning shared governance system? Do stakeholders understand how they can be involved?*

- Around 69% of **parents** reported receiving updates from Policy Council representatives or site staff monthly, or every 2-3 months, or less than every 3 months. Policy Council news are shared through the Family Support staff or through bulletin board notes, newsletters, or parent-to-parent communication. 75% of these parents rated communication from their sites about Policy Council meetings and decisions as very or extremely effective. In focus groups, a few parents who are familiar with Policy Council see it as a “representation of their community” where one’s voice can be heard and where one can hear “other perspectives on areas that affect children’s development.” There was a sense that there are “tremendous growth and leadership opportunities for those who get involved.”
- **HOWEVER:** There are at least 31% of **parents** who are not aware of or who do not fully understand the function of the Policy Council. But even among parents who are aware of the Council, a number reported that they have not received Policy Council updates and/or they do not know who their Policy Council representative is. At the same time, some **Policy**

Council representatives commented that they are not sure how to explain the Policy Council and its work to other parents. Some further expressed their need for greater clarity on what can and cannot be shared from the Council meetings with families at their sites. On their end, 33% of **site staff** and 32% of **center leaders** said that they did not know how often Council representatives or site staff communicated information about Policy Council meetings and decisions with families at their sites. Nonetheless, along with **parents, site/center staff** identified the time commitment and location of the Policy Council meetings as barriers to greater parent participation.

- 8) **PSESD Early Learning Program Communication:** *What communication tools/strategies do staff find most useful? Especially in communicating the ‘why’ behind decisions. How can we improve? How effective are current family communication methods in reaching families?*
- 94% of **center leaders** and 73% of **site staff** regarded PSESD communication to site/center staff as at least somewhat effective in informing them about *to-do’s and timelines* that are relevant to their position. As well, 83% of **center leads** and 71% of **site staff** regarded PSESD communication about *policies & procedures* also as at least somewhat effective. Meanwhile, **PSESD program staff** rated the PSESD communication to themselves about *to-do lists and timelines* (71%) and about *policies & procedures* (68%) to be at least somewhat effective.
 - 85-86% of **parents** had very positive perceptions and experiences of communication from their sites. They considered that communication from sites are very or extremely effective regarding parent/family events, community resources, their child’s school readiness, what is happening in their child’s classroom, and opportunities to be involved at one’s site. 74% of parents also thought that site communication regarding peer learning opportunities was very effective. Parents receive information and reminders in different ways– text, email, notes in backpack, pamphlets at drop off/ pick-up, and flyers. Information is also translated in Spanish in some sites.
 - **HOWEVER:** 45% to 56% of **site staff**, 35% to 56% of **center leaders**, and 46% to 50% of **PSESD staff** rated PSESD communication to sites/centers regarding *WHY decisions are made, HOW decisions are made, and how decisions affect site/center staff work or job* as slightly or not at all effective. Moreover, over a third of **site staff** (35-36%) and **PSESD staff** (36-37%) also thought that PSESD communication to sites regarding *urgent or time-sensitive information and emerging news/information/guidance* was also either only slightly effective or not at all effective. Overall, many **center/site staff** expressed want to be stronger and more active participants of the Early Learning Program team. Site staff and center leaders would like to be better engaged in decision-making, especially where changes are in the offing. They conveyed the import of clear, well-explained, consistent, and solid information that include context and expectations surrounding changes in policies, processes, procedures, or forms. Timely sharing of such critical information will allow for rich discussion between center/site staff and PSESD Early Learning Program leaders prior to implementation. Additionally, center and site staff noted that follow-up communication from PSESD which recognizes the changes/improvements made to the program that are specifically based on center/site staff contributions (e.g., input; feedback) further strengthens partnerships in the program.
- 9) **Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework:** *What is the current level of familiarity with the Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework areas among parents⁵ and staff? Where is it strong/weak & why? What is the current level of use of the PCFE framework among*

⁵ In this Self-Assessment round, parents were not asked questions about the PFCE Framework.

family support specialists? Where is it strong/weak & why? What needs to be changed to improve use?

- 81% of **all staff** (and 84% of **family support specialists**) were at least somewhat familiar with the PFCE Framework. A large majority of **family support services staff** (i.e., 71% to 75%) rated themselves as very or extremely capable in using most of the PFCE Framework outcomes in preparing children and families for school. 68% to 72% of the family support specialists rated their work with families to achieve 4 of the 7 PCFE outcomes—Family Well-being; Parent-Child Relationships; Family as Learners; and Family Engagement in Transitions—also as very or extremely effective; while 86% to 89% rated their support of families to achieve the other outcomes—Family as Lifelong Educators; Family Connections to Peers and Community; and Family as Advocates and Leaders—as at least somewhat effective. **Site staff and center leaders** who know the PFCE Framework commented that the Framework outcomes are integral to all that they already do. Many site staff underscored their focus on Family Well-being and Parent-Child Relationships in their daily interactions with parents.
- **HOWEVER:** Of the 50% of **PSESD staff** who reported that they provide support to sites in using the PFCE Framework outcomes in preparing children and families for school, 36% to 39% indicated that supporting site staff in using the Framework was at least somewhat challenging especially for particular outcomes—Family Well-being; Family Engagement in Transitions; and Family Connection to Peers and Community. **Site staff**, on their end, shared that the PFCE Framework training was very theoretical and did not provide scenarios or specific strategies that reflected and were relevant to their experiences. They also observed that although they seem to be already engaged in work that falls within the PFCE Framework, they may not be using the Framework to organize or think about their work. Finally, there was a call for teachers to be exposed to the Framework, too. Staff suggested that through cross-service trainings and meetings, the Framework can be used to explain program requirements such as making home visits.

10) **Monitoring and Planning Processes:** *How well do site staff and leadership understand and use the monitoring system? What is site staff and leadership proficiency on data entry? What is site staff and leadership proficiency at monitoring compliance through data systems? What is the level of staff and leadership understanding of their roles in monitoring? Do site-level staff receive or have access to the data they need to improve programming and implementation? How can PSESD improve the provision of and/or access to useful data to sites?*

- 83% of **center leaders** reported that they have been at least somewhat involved in strategic planning processes. A great majority of center leaders deemed that strategic planning at their centers/sites were at least somewhat aligned with the PSESD Early Learning program priorities: School Readiness (88%); Opportunity Gap/Racial Equity (84%); and High-Quality Services Supported by High-Quality Systems (80%). And 70% of center leaders rated the Early Learning Program Planning process as at least somewhat effective in strategic planning which involves analyzing data, identifying priorities and goals, and developing strategies to reach those goals. Also, 88% of **center leaders** and 77% of **site staff** acknowledge that data are at least somewhat important in the planning process used for the Early Learning program at their center/site. Meanwhile, 77% of **PSESD staff** said that data are very or extremely important in the Early Learning Program planning process.
- 95% of **center leaders** rated themselves as at least somewhat capable in ensuring compliance with program requirements and 78% of **site staff** said that they were very or extremely capable in ensuring compliance with program requirements. Both groups were confident in their competence in engaging in activities that support compliance with

- program requirements comprised of collecting and entering data; running reports/reviewing data; identifying areas of compliance and noncompliance; and developing and implementing corrective actions plans for areas of noncompliance.
- **HOWEVER:** 38% of **site staff** reported that they were only slightly or not at all involved or not sure if and to what extent they were involved in strategic planning. 44% of site staff either said that they did not know how effective the PSESD process is or rated PSESD's planning process as only slightly or not at all effective. **Site staff and center leaders** suggested that their centers/sites can improve in strategic planning by having a better understanding of the PSESD program priorities; getting more training from PSESD and attending PLCs focused on data analysis and using data to identify priorities, goals, and strategies to achieve them; obtaining data coaching or finding data review protocols; and setting up ways to measure goal achievement and evaluate which strategies are working. They also thought that an increase in presentation and usage of ERSEA, GOLD, Health, and Fiscal data at planning meetings will bridge knowledge gaps and keep sites informed about what data are showing. Overall, 84% of **PSESD program staff** rated the task of ensuring compliance with program requirements as at least somewhat challenging. About half of PSESD staff also rated the various activities that support compliance with program requirements as at least somewhat challenging: collecting and entering data (57%); running reports/reviewing data (50%); identifying areas of compliance and noncompliance (46%); and developing and implementing corrective actions plans for areas of noncompliance (49%). **PSESD staff and center leaders** agreed that monitoring activities can be improved by ensuring that everyone knows, understands, and interprets the performance standards in the same way; by establishing clear thresholds of compliance versus noncompliance for each area that is monitored; and by continuing PSESD support to site/center staff (e.g., Learning Labs for center leads; help with writing Corrective Action Plans). Site/center and PSESD staff also queried the possibility of streamlining forms to avoid duplication of efforts and limiting changes in forms, processes, and policies to achieve clarity and consistency.