
The Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Conference
Final Summary Report

“Instead of a school-centric universe, begin to think about kids’ perspectives and families’ perspectives.” – Dr. Ann Ishimaru

Background:

On September 29, 2018, SEL for Washington and The Washington State Family and Community Engagement Trust brought together families, students, educators, and community partners from across Washington State to better understand Social Emotional Learning and inspire deeper commitment to creating supportive and inclusive school environments where students and families feel safe, confident, and supported.

The specific goals of the conference were to:

1. Increase knowledge and understanding of Social Emotional Learning
2. Understand the barriers to success and engagement for youth and families
3. Build relationships between families and school teams to advance collaboration on Social Emotional Learning and family engagement efforts in school districts
4. Work together to co-design recommendations on how to create safe, supportive, equitable, and inclusive schools.

Sharing our Collective Knowledge

We began our day with opportunities for individual, small group and large group shared learning. Dr. Mona Johnson, CDP, Ed.D. (Director of Student Support at the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction) grounded us in a basic understanding of what Social Emotional Learning is and why it is important.

Individual Breakout Sessions covered the following topics:

1. **Social Emotional Learning and Equity** - Mary Fertakis, Equity consultant for the National School Boards Association and former Tukwila School Board Director

2. **Supporting Parents in Promoting Children's Social Emotional and Academic Competence** - Dr. Liliana Lengua, Professor of Child Clinical Psychology and Director of the Center for Child and Family Well-Being, University of WA
3. **Conversations about Race with Young Children** - Dawn Williams, Doctoral Student and Curriculum Specialist, Cultivate Learning, University of WA College of Education
4. **Student Voices** - High School students discuss what belonging and inclusion means to them.
5. **Creating Welcoming Environments for Diverse Families** - Adie Simmons, founder and president of Washington Family Engagement
6. **A Broader Vision of Student Success: Social Emotional Learning in Washington State** - Ron Hertel, OSPI Program Supervisor and creator of the Compassionate School Initiative, and Sarah Butcher, Co-founder of SEL for WA

As we moved back into the space of shared learning Greg Williamson Director of Student Engagement, WA Department of Children, Youth and Families explained why Social Emotional Learning matters in his work with youth at the newly formed Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Finally, **The One out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project** was presented by Carrie Basas (Director, Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds), Clark Matthews (Lead Producer, Rooted in Rights videography), Angelina Gammons-Reese (7th grader, Meridian Parent Partnership Program, Ferndale), Warren Lybbert (9th grader, Quincy High School, Quincy), Adina Rosenberg (Teacher, Bellevue School District), and Sarah Arvey (PhD student, UW College of Education). The website created for this project includes videos about the experiences of middle school students with disabilities, as well as lesson plans teachers can use to teach about disability history and advocacy. The panelists discussed the process of creating these videos and lesson plans. The students expressed the hope that sharing their personal stories would make schools and communities more responsive, inclusive, and compassionate towards disabled people. The lesson plans fill a widespread need for information about the history and contributions of disabled people. Teaching all students about the history of the disability rights movement can also foster self-advocacy, pride, and allyship.



The power of storytelling – Can we have a group story to tell as educators, families, and students?

The conference culminated in a co-design workshop led by Dr. Ann Ishimaru, Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Washington. Participatory forms of design – such as co-design – are useful in that they both satisfy a moral imperative of taking into consideration from the beginning

how a design may impact different groups of users, and also meet a more pragmatic imperative that calls for stakeholders' early involvement in the design process to maximize the appropriateness of the service or product to be produced. Co-Design is guided by the core value that people who will be affected by a decision or an event should have an opportunity to influence it.¹ In other words, it follows the principle of 'Nothing about us without us.'



Using a case study and guiding questions, groups consisting of families, educators, and community partners worked together to reflect, discuss, and envision what a school or district would do differently if they were successful in cultivating racial equity and social emotional wellness.

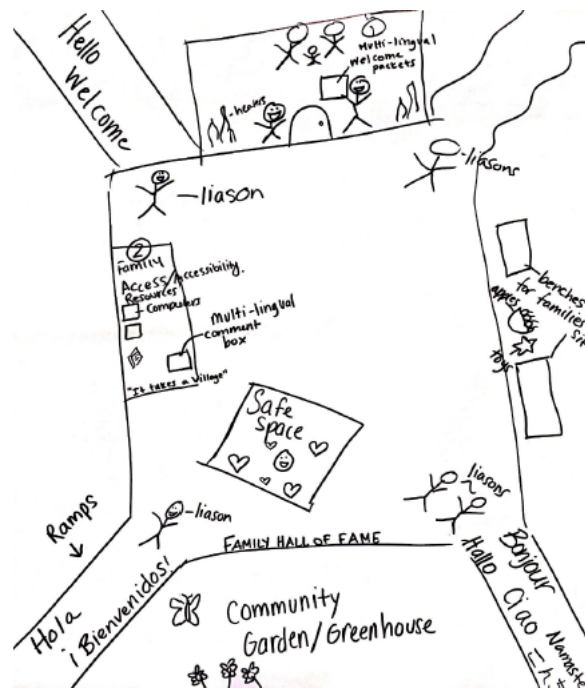
¹ WA State of the Education Ombuds and Arketect. "Reducing the Opportunity Gap by Empowering Students, Families, and Communities." (2018) P. 21

Our Shared Vision – A Call to Action

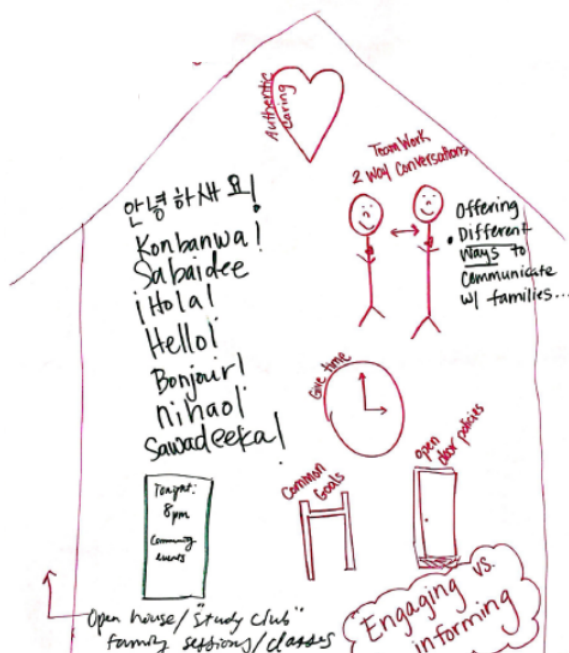
1. Collaborate as equals—There is a strong call to move from the top-down model that has been in place, where experts tell parents and students what they need to know and do, to a collaborative one, in which educators, staff, students, family, and community members share their expertise to build a better community for all.

In the top-down model, the voices of marginalized communities often get ignored or even deliberately shut out. In the collaborative model, different forms of knowledge are valued and considered when making decisions and crafting policies.

In the top-down model, some parents have more impact than others, sometimes even overpowering the experts or hindering their efforts, because they possess cultural capital that gives them inequitable power. In the collaborative model, the voices have more equality, because the process is built to include input from all impacted stakeholders. Co-design processes, like that used for this workshop, are exemplary of the collaborative approach.



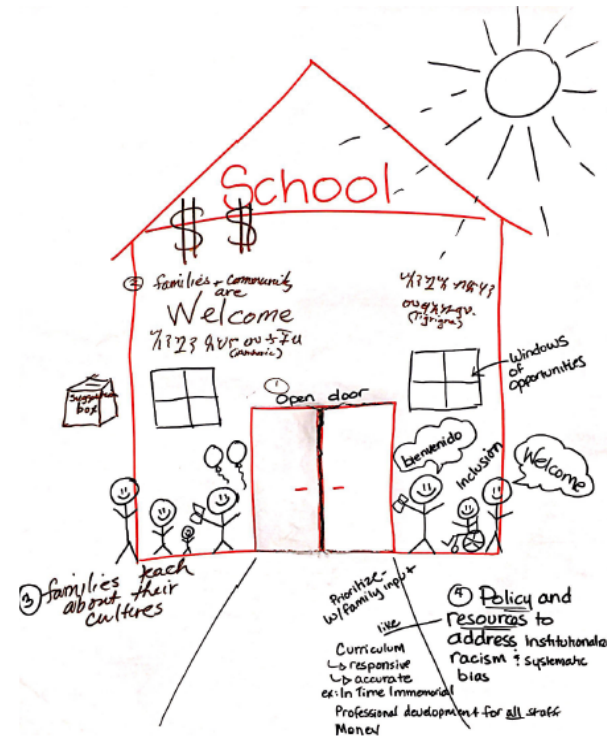
2. Invest in relationships—Collaboration cannot happen in a vacuum. It is founded on relationships. People are only willing to share their thoughts with people they trust to use that information wisely and in their best interests.



That trust is built over time, when youth and their families feel heard and see meaningful responses to what they have shared. Students need to feel that they're not just an ID number, but are recognized as people with a voice in the construction of their educational experiences and environments. Parents need to feel like they are trusted partners in their children's education.

The trust necessary for relationships is also built through shared experiences, such as those created by schools partnering with community members and organizations to put on events and programs. The participants in our workshop expressed a strong desire for a lived sense that the school exists within a community context, with multiple and diverse pathways connecting the school to the community and trusted ambassadors to guide people along those pathways.

3. Use Universal Design— Building relationships begins with a welcome that recognizes students and their families in their uniqueness and specificity. For example, many participants described their ideal school as having an entrance decorated with “welcome” written in all the languages used by families whose children attend the school, including Braille and American Sign Language (ASL). Inclusion can’t stop at the entrance, however. Programs, policies, and spaces should be created to be responsive to learner variability. The school staff and curricula both need to reflect the diversity of the student populations served by the school. The grading and evaluation criteria need to be crafted with Universal Design principles in mind, just as much as the classroom exercises and physical spaces.



Conclusion -- Running through and supporting each of the above is Social Emotional Learning, for both youth and adults. We cannot collaborate or build relationships without the kinds of skills taught and developed by Social Emotional Learning programs. These programs need to be trauma-informed, culturally sustaining, and Universally Designed to be accessible and appropriate for every learner in our schools. They should also be created in ways that promote equity, rather than reinforcing existing inequities.

Seen, Heard, Connected, and Respected – Youth Voice and Action

Our Youth Panel had a lot to say about their experiences in school and community, both good and bad, and shared recommendations for what could be done to

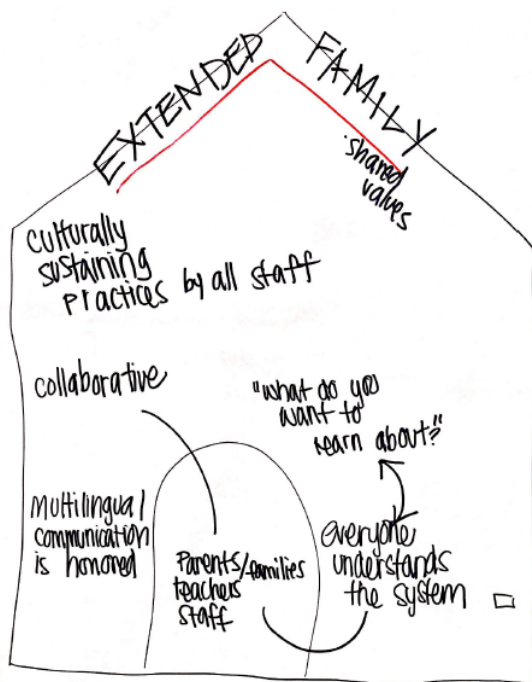
Students want to be HEARD—They want to have a voice in their educational experiences. They want educators and parents to listen when they tell them about what they are experiencing, without jumping in to give them solutions. They want a chance to process what they are going through themselves. They don't want adults to speak for them. Instead, they want adults to provide developmentally appropriate scaffolding for their own self-advocacy.

Students want to be CONNECTED— They want to feel known and like they know their teachers. They want to have ongoing relationships with the adults in their lives, at school as well as at home. One student pointed out that they did not just mean the teachers and coaches or directors; sometimes it was the janitor or cafeteria worker who made the effort to connect with them on a daily basis. They want these adults to take action when students have trouble and help them find solutions that work. They recognize that principals are there to support teachers,



but want recognition that administrators are also there to support students. They want to have chances to connect with students in other grades and in different programs. They recognize that having a diverse range of students in their classrooms, including students with disabilities and different levels of academic proficiency, better prepares them for life after school.

Students want to be RESPECTED—Often people hear the word “respect” and think of something like recognizing authority. Students instead want mutually respectful relationships that are rooted in connection and built up through trust. They want connections with adults who show up as full humans and not just instructors, and who see them in the same way. One student remembered a teacher who used to his favorite songs to give the students a sense of who he is. Another took time to learn what her students were interested in outside of school and bonded over common affinities. They want to feel like their teachers believe in them and are invested in their learning and success beyond the limited frame of tests scores and report cards.



With Gratitude:

We appreciate our amazing conference presenters and speakers, our partners the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and our sponsors Tulalip Tribes, Scholastic, The Latino Community Fund, and WA Department of Health. Thank you to each person who spent their Saturday with us and participated in this work.

We are also grateful for all of the insights that were shared by those in attendance through the Co-design workshop. We have shared some of their drawings and writings in the pictures above. We want to be sure that you have access to all of their work. Here is the link to view all of the drawings from that day.

<http://www.selforwa.com/2018-diversity-inclusion-and-belonging-conference.html>