SCESD 2020-2021 THRIVE Summative Report

SCESD undertook a strategic effort to gather input from staff regarding the ESD's current level of support for staff to THRIVE. We understand that employee personal satisfaction at work is one of the highest indicators of an organization's success. The THRIVE continuum ranges from meeting basic needs like safety, providing for oneself and one's family, contributing to society, being truly known, connecting with colleagues, learning, and growing and feeling supported both by the organization and by colleagues. In order for our employees to THRIVE we undertook the work of measuring these indicators and evaluating the metrics for improvement.

The process was open to all staff and included a variety of opportunities for information to be shared including virtually in groups and one on one, safely in person and through digital and written formats. All input was gathered confidentially and trended by Gina Castro Brandt and Dawn Granger. This document is the result of these shared perspectives, experiences and insight of SCESD staff and the trust and candor of these individuals is both greatly appreciated and much needed as we seek to be a place where all of our people and the children and families we serve THRIVE.

We gathered data in two ways- Focus Groups and Empathy Interviews.

> Focus Groups were attended by over100 SCESD employees. The participants were provided 6 questions ahead of time and many returned them with writing/drawing. They also answered poll questions about SCESD Guiding Principles and Work Agreements. We added in the comments from the chat log of meetings that applied to each question and considered that input as well as verbal input and any additional shared information regarding the six questions.

> Empathy Interviews were the second phase of the ESD-wide process to further our THRIVE, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Mission. The invitation for Empathy Interviewing was sent to all staff as part of our efforts to better understand and support individuals to thrive and our organization to identify barriers to that thriving. The interviews were a way to learn and more deeply understand the emotions, motivations and choices that are made within the workplace so that we might become familiar with individual needs.

> The email invitation included an express invitation for staff who represented diversity. It stated that all participants were welcome and that we were very interested in reaching out to those who represent diversity including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, People of color, LGBTQ2SIA+, men, those that identify with non-predominate culture identities, those that experience homelessness, houselessness and poverty in the region and our organization.

The THRIVE inquiry process engaged the vast majority of staff in multiple manners and assuring anonymity to gather important insight into the experiences and perspectives of the people who make up our organization. The next steps could include a wider sharing and trending of the data, an analysis of where the information fits into the current climate and service evaluation systems, further discussion about the recommendations made by staff through the process, and what additional information the organization may want to have considering what we have learned.

SCESD 2020 Focus Group Data

Poll Data:
The polls were done in zoom and were the first input opportunity people experienced. Participants were shown the SCESD working agreements and asked to respond to four questions in the poll. The answers were shared and discussed. Then participants were also shown SCESDs Mission and Guiding Principles, and the process was repeated using the same questions. The participants were asked to indicate as many responses as applied for all aspects of their experiences including individual, team and overall organization. There were clarifying questions as to how to answer for some groups.

Working Agreements
- These reflect my experiences at SCESD- 46%
- These do not reflect my experiences- 4%
- I have experienced these at SCESD- 85%
- I support these Agreements- 91%

Mission and Guiding Principles
- These reflect my experiences at SCESD- 52%
- These do not reflect my experiences- 1%
- I have experienced these at SCESD- 68%
- I support these Principles- 87%

THRIVE Questions Data:

1. What are some of the reasons you choose to work at SCESD?

Strengths- Reasons included enjoy working with/helping children, making a difference. This is followed closely by an appreciation for colleagues (very high), support and the organization in general which is viewed as meeting a need/serving the students and families.

Common responses indicated a feeling of positive culture*, a sense of belonging, the ability to learn and improve, feeling trusted and respected as well as a consideration of the place where we work- the beauty and climate. Several mentioned the pay, benefits, hours, calendar and being able to prioritize family due to the schedule.
Because we asked for reasons people work at SCESD we did not get specific feedback on opportunities for growth.

Example Reasons for working at SCESD:
- The ESD gives me the opportunity to work with students that I adore!
- I get a chance to make a positive difference in the world.
- Everyone communicates and is respectful of each other.
- ESD was a better opportunity than working for a district.
- I believe in our basic principles and philosophy.
- I love things about this area and working here allows me to live here. SCESD has been an amazing new beginning for me.
- I feel trusted and respected in a very welcoming work environment. I appreciate the ability to be my true authentic self- it allows me to concentrate on my work and not pretend to be something I am not.

2. In what ways does SCESD allow for you to be seen and known; develop collegial relationships and forge connections.

Strengths were in the area of teams and partners working together, having regular meetings and trainings or classes together and relying upon one another. The Book of Faces was mentioned numerous times.

Common responses also included a recognition of COVID making this more difficult, a desire to connect with the larger organization, to revive social clubs. Several acknowledged that being based in a district/school made relationships there closer than in the past.

How do we help make that happen?
- More ESD-wide PD,
- Shared training opportunities,
- Time for staff wellness,*
- "No agenda" meetings, food and games

Opportunities for growth
- increasing opportunities for staff to gather in meaningful ways,
- improving communication between administrators and staff, *
- socializing for fun- like clubs and celebrations,
- help new people forge connections.

3. How do we thrive at SCESD in our profession? In what ways does working here engage us in learning?

Strengths were around learning, flexibility, consistency and attitude, attending individual trainings and skill development as well as being able to facilitate peer learning/help others in the organization in areas where they have expertise. Many reported being challenged and supported. Being part of a team and serving again came up often.

Common responses included being part of a team, learning by watching/sharing with peers, accessible training and managers, being motivated by the students served and impact made, serving others, reviewing scenarios/sharing practices.

A few responses include utilizing THRIVE every day – connecting the concept to our work, networking with other professionals, setting goals, having the freedom/latitude to be innovative.

How do we help make that happen?
- PD,
- Collaboration opportunities,
- Utilize our resident experts/veteran staff,
- More funds and resources to attend PD… parties and gatherings to acknowledge and celebrate our hard work
- Recognize staff who have been here awhile

Opportunities for growth
- Providing support for quality professional learning and for training in areas needed,
- Support training to learn new skills online,
- Provide for time for staff to gather to debrief/de-stress, *
- Provide flexible scheduling for staff to seek outside training and still complete duties

4. Do you feel supported as a member of the SCESD community?

Strengths- The most common responses were yes with staff identifying whom they felt support from such as team members, partners, departments, colleagues.
Less common responses included references to support during COVID, issues with school closures and concern over exposure. A theme that emerged was an appreciation for the work ESD has done around COVID safety and a desire to see consistency in the districts we serve as well.

Opportunities for growth
- Strengthening the relationships outside the immediate team/department and
- Working on clarity of communication and assuring that staff are heard even when their input Is not acted upon. *

5. In what ways are you supported-by the organization and colleagues.

Organizational Support Examples: professionally supported, training and certifications, administrator/supervisor knowledge of work being done, manager hearing and listening, collaboratively resolving issues, recognition of achievement/dedication, positive feedback, responsiveness, job materials provided, flexible schedule, technology, maintenance…

Colleague Support Examples: collaboration, encouragement, support, relationships, teamwork, checking in with one another, win-win environment, guidance and support with materials, caring and willingness to help, personal relationships.

Opportunities for growth:
- Feeling a lack of support from supervisor,*
- Not being able to connect with peers,
- Concern over COVID issues and stress.*

6. Do you feel safe at work?

Safety was defined in multiple ways. Discussions about safety included references to pre-COVID and then now with COVID concerns in all but one focus group. That group did not mention COVID.
Additionally, references to safety were often clarified as being different within the SCESD buildings and the schools- some staff indicating that there were differences between schools where they worked and the ESD as far as safety protocols and climate. When this was brought up two staff explained that there is inconsistency between schools and they may feel safe in one and not another. There was one staff member who shared that such a concern had been alleviated after they spoke with their ESD admin.

Strengths- The overwhelming response was that staff feel safe. Safety included a supportive environment, SCESD taking COVID protocols seriously, SCESD having the equipment and training they need, feeling known and heard, and being able to make mistakes and learn without fear.

Areas for growth/Trends-
- COVID shifts in response (see below) *
- Boundaries around work expectations including a confusion about district and ESD requirements, *
- Social constructs with admin and collegial groups perceptions including confidentiality and personal freedom to share thoughts and opinions even if they differ from others.

Safety Concern Examples:
- Corona Virus safe? Not completely.
- I do not feel safe anywhere right now.
- I feel physically safe but not always socially or emotionally.
- Things have been said in confidence in meetings and these have not been confidential.
- I am not safe to say what I think. I do not feel I can be me. Part of working in a government agency.
- Most of the time I do but I feel you cannot be yourself around everyone. *

What would increase that safety?

- We should work from home with COVID- unsafe otherwise*
- Rid the world of pandemics so I don't have to live in fear of getting a horrible disease that will kill me. I just want to do my job.
- I think classrooms should have air purifiers. More masks for children when our students' masks are disgusting.
- Continue to be proactive.
- Having a smaller class or more staff.
- We need training on diversity and how to support children and families not just each other as employees.
- I would love to have a safety defense class

Please note that comments with an * were also shared during empathy interviews and are emphasized here to reflect that.

Further Input from Focus Group Participants
At the start of each session participants were asked to give themselves permission to authentically engage in the exercises using padlet and specifying what they had permission to do or not to do. At the end of each session participants were offered an opportunity to create slides reflecting the experience or communicate additional information. Here is a sample of these responses:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1BeELKyABZgp2p0Clg1VR64lZKU1iKIk80Z4nFCDrQuA/edit?usp=sharing

SCESD 2020-21 Empathy Interview Data

We are grateful to the those who came and shared themselves. These 30 minute virtual or (safely) in person discussions demonstrated trust, courage and a dedication to help with positive change. It is important to know the story of those who work here at SCESD- especially those whose experiences and challenges may differ based upon their diversity. This helps us to connect, empathize and create a positive atmosphere for **all** people here at the ESD and ultimately within our community.

Diversity
- 14 staff participants were asked to self-identify their diversity if they chose to do so. The group responses included diversity of:
- Gender
- LGBTQ+
- Religious
- Family/Marital status
- Health Differences
- Learning Differences
- Children/family with health/learning differences

Question 1- What helps you THRIVE here?

Strengths-
Common responses included colleagues, work climate, helping students and administration/supervisors.

Example Reasons for THRIVING at SCESD- all are quotes:
- Great staff
- Love the people I work with
- I have support from my administrator
- I love kids
- Providing access and services to kids in underserved communities
- I have deep relations established
- Clear communication here helps me do my job well

2. Based on your diversity, are there systemic barriers that we are not aware of that specifically affect you?

Strengths
The interview process which clearly explains the expectations for employees to observe diversity, equity and inclusion were mentioned. There appeared to be an almost universal understanding that the ESD expects employees to be welcoming and that our leadership models it.

Common responses
These included not feeling accepted by staff- being subjected to unwelcome comments and actions due to their sexuality, gender or race, feeling like they cannot advocate for themselves without being judged, experiencing racism and intolerance at work (in district schools and at ESD) and in the community with ESD employees.

<u>Examples of barriers/experiences- all are quotes</u>

- The environment is a lot more welcoming with administration than it can be with staff.
- There is a huge disconnect between my building and the ESD
- I do not see any barriers myself.
- The barriers are there but just need simple tweaks- flexibility and accommodations for staff
- I have had personal experience being treated disrespectfully due to my diversity- at work.
- In the trainings for diversity, I hear people say things about how the training is stupid and wonder why we are doing it. As a person who represents diversity it is disheartening. They just don't care.

<u>Opportunities for growth</u>
- Training on generational trauma- the history of racism and bias in our region.
- Assuring that all employees understand the experiences of our diverse staff and the role privilege plays in the continuation of such practices- more on bias and equity but also specifically privilege and oppression
- Creating a way to support employees who are subjected to racism, homophobia and other intolerance outside of our organization

3. Anything else we should know?

<u>Responses- all are quotes</u>
- I serve in a very racist school district
- I don't think the agency will ever get gender diversity because education is not a field that men in our region have traditionally entered. They can get jobs that pay well and are more like what is expected of them..
- We need to treat staff here like we do students- individually to meet their needs
- Every day I have to think first about what people are thinking before I can be myself.
- Hiring diverse people who may not be the best person for the job or have the most experience …that seems the way the world is going.
- I am constantly feeling like I don't have the right or space to say certain things but other people can freely say things that may be offensive to me.
- The lack of diversity in this region seems to make a lot of people in the community think they have more right to be here

<u>Opportunities for growth</u>
- Staff have said they feel that if they express normal and appropriate reactions to the way they are being treated by other staff they will become a stereotype and be dismissed. Training and ongoing staff discussions may help us engage authentically and address these issues.
- Affinity and Ally groups may help individuals connect and experience one another- develop empathy for the experiences of others, recognize what is happening and disrupt the cycle. Structured correctly, this could also help us address the loss of social connection (much lamented in the Focus Groups) that we have seen due to COVID.

*Some individuals re-shared concerns about COVID safety, district-wide policies and issues that were not related to diversity. All of these were seen in the Focus Group sessions and the specific information shared will be therefore included in the final report under the Focus Group data with a notation that they were shared at Empathy Interviews. In this way we will honor the input and place it where it should be considered.