**Cultural Competence Review**
**Submitted to State and Local Coordination Project Team**
**January 16th, 2013**

NATIONAL EQUITY PROJECT

## Scope of Review

The National Equity Project has been contracted by the Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project to conduct a Cultural Competence Review of the project's Preliminary Recommendations, to provide feedback as it develops its Final Recommendations. The purpose of this review is to provide findings and recommendations to the project on the document's attention to racial equity and cultural inclusion, and likelihood for having a positive impact for Washington children and families furthest from opportunity. The review included the Preliminary Recommendations and supporting documents:

- Preliminary Recommendations
- Performance Goals discussion paper
- Levels of Engagement discussion paper
- ELAC Membership discussion paper
- Summary of comments from phase one public outreach
- Survey form for phase two public outreach
- Initial Cultural Competence Review conducted during the project's planning phase.

The scope and objectives for this review were developed in discussions with the Project Planning Team and the completed review was presented to and discussed with the Project Planning Team.

## Review Criteria

The framework used for this review is the Racial Equity Theory Of Change, a guide for designing strategies to close chronic racial outcome gaps developed by the Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change. The Racial Equity Theory Of Change (RETOC) outlines a five step process for developing strategy:

| RETOC Terminology | |
|---|---|
| **Building Blocks** | Building Blocks are the necessary and sufficient preconditions needed to achieve your goal |
| **Public Policies** | Public policies are laws that directly allocate public resources and indirectly influence the distribution of private resources. |
| **Institutional Practices** | Institutional practices are the cultural norms, and decision-making and standard operating procedures of public and private institutions |
| **Cultural Representations** | Cultural representations are frames, popular images and stereotypes of people of color that, though damaging to their prospects for achieving genuine equality of opportunity, are widely seen as "unbiased" or "harmless." |
| **Local Change Landscape** | Local Change Landscape is the elected officials, interest groups, government administrators, business executives, media and entertainment organizations, unions, opinion leaders, and other important local/state actors who must be (a) engaged to bring about change, and (b) monitored, either because they have opposed such change historically, or can be expected to oppose this proposed change. |

Adapted from the Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change, www.aspeninstitute.org

The RETOC process is consistent with the Aspen Institute's goals to:

- Broaden our understanding of the causes and the problems of poverty, inequality and community distress in America
- Clarify our understanding of the forces that maintain the racial disparity status quo and limit the success of strategies for change
- Identify how and why an emphasis on racial equity might enhance the possibility of success in current and future social change efforts and
- Highlight new approaches that could complement and reinforce existing activities

The RETOC steps were also utilized in the National Equity Project's initial Cultural Competence Review for the Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project to provide feedback on the project process during the planning phase.

## Findings

The findings from our review of the Preliminary Recommendations and supporting documents are organized around each of the RETOC steps. They include **examples** and **evidence** of attention to racial equity and cultural inclusion consistent with the RETOC guide, and **opportunities** for strengthening the racial equity focus of the document. When using the RETOC as a planning tool, the process begins with Step 1 What You Want and ends with Step 5 What You Must Do, in order to backwards map from target outcome to action planning. For the purpose of review, we've organized our findings in reverse order starting with Step 5, in order to reflect the timeline of plan implementation.

<u>Step 5 What You Must Do: Assessing Your Capacity, Planning, & Gearing up for Action</u>
Examples and Evidence

- Our initial Cultural Competence Review of the project work plan and process found that the process outlined for the project was consistent with the RETOC steps and demonstrated plans and procedures for including diverse voices and perspectives.
- A few brief descriptions of the project process and number of interviews conducted are included on Page 1 of the Preliminary Recommendations.

Opportunities

- Adding specific mention of the project's goal of including perspectives from the state's diversity of race, culture, language, income and region would introduce the project's intention to address issues of racial equity and to hear historically under-represented voices.
- Our initial Cultural Competence Review included questions for each stage of the process to highlight the essential reflection for each RETOC step. These questions may be useful guides for the examples and evidence to highlight from the project process.

Step 4 What You Must Know: Mapping the Local Change Landscape

Examples and Evidence

- Clear descriptions of some of the key leadership groups involved in Early Learning are detailed in the "How is early learning coordinated now" section on page 3. The descriptions of the ELAC and Regional Early Learning Coalitions describe their relationships with various stakeholder groups.
- The Capacity Barriers and Coordination Barriers listed on page 2 describe some of the stakeholder dynamics, particularly related to access and communication. Some differences and disparities are noted, but few specific demographic details are included. Examples:
    - "Not enough people to meet professional standards in some parts of the state"
    - "Rural families and communities are isolated, with unique challenges"

Opportunities

- Further description of the known power and social capital dynamics within and between leadership groups and stakeholder groups, can begin to map the change landscape that any successful early learning strategy will need to navigate.
- Sharing observed data patterns disaggregated by race and other demographics, may be an opportunity to describe differences in access, experience and outcome based on race, culture, language, income and region, and to begin to make the case for "What changes are being suggested".
- Sharing relevant examples and patterns from the stakeholder interviews can describe how race and various stakeholder roles are depicted in the key narratives about needs, access, and decision-making authority in early learning.

Step 3 What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks?: Identifying Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations

Examples and Evidence

- Two of the Opportunities listed on page 2 highlight key principles for achieving racial equity: Partnering with communities furthest from opportunity in planning services, and providing flexibility that respects local needs and context.
    - "Engage and empower the families and communities whose children are experiencing the greatest disparities to help plan services and monitor progress and results"
    - "Provide more opportunities to set statewide funding goals and accountability measures and allow the flexibility for communities to tailor implementation plans to meet local needs"
- The Capacity Barriers and Coordination Barriers listed on page 2 describe several of the practices that will need to be addressed in order to make progress. Examples:
    - "Too few teachers have the preparation and tools to support children's learning in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways"

    - "No measures of program, system and child outcomes that both the state and local communities are commonly using"
- The Capacity Barriers and Coordination Barriers listed on page 2 describe one policy that will need to be addressed in order to make progress
    - "Agencies use different geographic boundaries for their initiatives"

Opportunities

- There are few references throughout the Preliminary Recommendations to differences in experience or outcomes based on race, culture, language, income or region. The ways in which current practices and policies are differently impacting families and communities is essential data for designing strategies that will address racial equity.
- No specific references to cultural representations (racially or culturally based stereotypes, assumptions and associations) were found. The surfacing of cultural representations can provide opportunities for identifying practices and policies that reinforce these images, as well as for planning to check and counteract these assumptions.
- The interviews conducted for the Initial Outreach Survey and Opportunities, Barriers and Needs Report may provide ready examples and patterns for practices, policies and cultural representations.
    - Example: In the Outreach Survey Summary, participants shared their observations about the Coordination Barrier "Transition from early learning to elementary school is tough for families". The responses included the observation that the "gap for transition is especially large for families who speak other languages and for communities of color". Hearing, investigating and sharing patterns like this can reinforce the need for strategies to be targeted to support those most impacted.

<u>Step 2 Setting Your Priorities: Identifying the "Building Blocks" of Your Racial Equity Outcome</u>

Examples and Evidence

- In "What changes are being suggested" on pages 3 - 4, the recommended building blocks are listed and briefly described:
    - Statewide Performance Goals
    - Stakeholder Engagement
    - State-Local Communication and Connection
- Each of these building blocks is described in greater detail in a discussion paper. Each of these discussion papers details specific intentions, practices and policies that support racial equity and cultural inclusion.
    - The Performance Goals Examples
        - "Monitor statewide and regional progress toward the goals and understand issues regarding equity of access, program quality and outcomes for children in geographic, racial, socio-economic communities across the state"
        - "Advance the Early Learning Plan and make important contributions to improving: systems, equitable access to high quality services, and results for children, including racial equity"
    - Levels of Engagement Examples
        - "Do we have enough information to determine an effective and efficient course of action that will work for the breadth of Washington families, cultures and communities? If not, what additional information do we need and what is the best way to get it? "

        - "Do we need more information about how to reach specific groups of the children, families and others that the program is intended to serve?"
    - ELAC Membership Example
        - "The Council shall include diverse, statewide representation. Its members shall be intentionally recruited and selected to reflect regional, racial and cultural diversity so that ELAC can represent the needs of all children and families in the state. However, the membership details do not describe how diverse representation will be achieved.
- The charts on key coordination structures and functions provides a description of the recommended changes in leadership structure that embed responsibility for identified changes in practices and policies in each leadership group's charter.

Opportunities

- Incorporating the more explicit references to racial equity from each of the discussion papers into the Final Recommendations, both in the "What changes are being suggested and in the charts of key coordination structures and functions, would make the intended changes in relationships and communication across demographics and role more likely to be understood and achieved.
- For the Statewide Performance Goals, the creation of universal goals can lead to reproduction of historic patterns of outcomes unless success is explicitly defined as ensuring that each identified demographic within the state is achieving at the level identified in the goal.
- The ELAC Membership discussion paper includes a clear policy statement about diverse representation but provides little guidance on roles and practices for achieving this representation. In moving to implementation, it will be important to clarify how this representation can be achieved, who is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented, and when in the membership selection process this will be addressed to reduce uncertainty and inconsistency in implementation.

<u>Step 1 What You Want: Defining Your Desired Racial Equity Outcome</u>

Examples and Evidence

- The project's outcome is identified in the project plan as "Better aligned action supporting children's learning". The Preliminary Recommendations section "How will coordination be affected by these recommendations?" on page 7 shares some examples of improved coordination, alignment and communication that would be evidence of the successful implementation of the building blocks outlined in Step 2.

Opportunities

- In addition to evidence of successful implementation of the building blocks, the description of the intended impact for this project should include expected evidence of changes to the currently racialized patterns of outcome and experiences that are highlighted in Steps 3 and 4 of the RETOC.

**Potential Alignment with Advancing Racial Equity in Early Learning Outcome Map**

In a related effort to incorporate racial equity as a design priority in early learning strategic planning, Thrive by Five Washington convened a series of meetings with a diverse set of stakeholders representing parents, practitioners, researchers, community leaders, Department of Early Learning and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a roadmap for Advancing Racial Equity in Early Learning. They utilized the Racial Equity Theory Of Change as a guide for their

planning process, resulting in a Draft Outcome Map to guide their further work. Their identified Racial Equity Outcome is that “”Programs, policies and funding decisions to implement the Early Learning Plan are well informed and prioritized in response to the experience, perspective and needs of people of color”. Although this outcome is different from the Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project’s Outcome of “Better aligned action supporting children’s learning”, there is significant overlap in the intentions, observations and actions identified by the two projects.

The below table catalogs by RETOC step some of the excerpts from the Draft Outcome Map that seemed most relevant and potentially useful in the development of the Final Recommendations. These excerpts are intended to provide additional examples, ideas and language from a closely related project.

| RETOC Step | Excerpts from Advancing Racial Equity in Early Learning Draft Outcome Map |
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| **Step 5**<br>**What You Must Do: Assessing Your Capacity, Planning, & Gearing up for Action** | - Use disaggregated school district-level birth through eight information to identify ways to improve opportunity for children and families far from it<br>- Invite communities to participate in decisions about defining outcomes<br>- Create feedback loops that allow community participation in course correction<br>- Actively engage tribal leadership in defining desired outcomes and participating in decision-making processes/entities, from the beginning<br>- Actively recruit people of color in defining desired outcomes and participating in decision-making processes/entities, from the beginning<br>- Create flexible tables/venues/locations/methods of participating in meetings and other decision-making conversations<br>- Build racial equity into the work plans of initiatives and decision-making bodies |
| **Step 4**<br>**What You Must Know: Mapping the Local Change Landscape** | See attached Advancing Racial Equity in Early Learning Draft Outcome Map for a list and description of Potential Allies and Associated Opportunities |
| **Step 3**<br>**What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks?: Identifying Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations** | **Policies**<br>- Funding and support are available to allow/honor individual, organizational and tribal capacity to participate equally in decision-making processes<br>- People of color are intentionally represented in hiring, appointment and election of decision makers<br>- Education, experience, demonstrated commitment and reflection of children's culture are valued in assessment of quality of early learning programming and professional qualifications<br>- Educational equivalency and/or competency assessment processes exist to honor the importance and support the development and progression of early learning professionals who reflect children's language and cultures as part of the early learning workforce |
| | **Practices**<br>- Communities of color are intentionally reached and engaged by meeting in places convenient to them, providing interpretation services and using varied solutions to promote access<br>- Leadership coaching or mentoring is available for people of color within organizations to support them being advocates for their community in decision-making processes/relationship building<br>- Local communities engage a broad array of parents and professionals in local work and receive support and guidance as to how.<br>- Decision making bodies actively engage with members of diverse communities before making impactful decisions<br>- Regular thought provoking experiences exist to help decision makers be insightful about |

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| **Step 3 (cont.)**<br>**What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks?: Identifying Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations** | how structures impact those furthest from opportunity<br>- Data are gathered, analyzed and presented with intentional consideration of the cultural belief and framing in which the data is defined, collected and interpreted<br>- Feedback loops provide information and knowledge about the experiences and perspectives of people of color that informs design and refinement of early learning systems |
| | **Cultural Representations**<br>- It is readily acknowledged that one cultural voice does not represent all<br>- Children see people who are like them as teachers and community leaders<br>- Communities of color are engaged in defining what is credible and relevant data and how it is collected and used<br>- Robust qualitative data and experience is seen as equally important in the development of approaches that are reflective of the requirements of communities of color.<br>- Promising practices specific to communities of color are recognized as a critical strategy for meeting diverse needs |
| **Step 2**<br>**Setting Your Priorities: Identifying the "Building Blocks" of Your Racial Equity Outcome** | - Community Voice and Influence: There are expanded pathways for voice and influence for those furthest from opportunity<br>- Early Learning System Design and Implementation: State, local & tribal agencies consider historical and current realities of children of color in program design, implementation and coordination |
| **Step 1**<br>**What You Want: Defining Your Desired Racial Equity Outcome** | - Programs, policies and funding decisions to implement the Early Learning Plan are well informed and prioritized in response to the experience, perspective and needs of people of color |

## Recommendations

- In order for racial equity to be an effective priority in the Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project, the Final Recommendations should demonstrate a consistent explicit narrative on the role of racial equity and cultural inclusion in achieving the state's early learning goals. We recommend that this narrative include evidence and examples of racialized disparities in outcomes and experiences, and the practices, policies and cultural representations that contribute to those disparities. These descriptions provide context and urgency to the recommended building blocks for change and provide guidance for stakeholders and leaders about the landscape that they will need to navigate in order to effect measurable impact.
- Many of the opportunities identified in the findings can be addressed by incorporating details and language from the supporting documents. We recommend mining these documents, as well as the interviews conducted during Stakeholder Interviews and Outreach, and the project's data reports, for further examples and evidence.
- The Advancing Racial Equity in Early Education Outcome Map (currently still in draft form), developed by stakeholders in the early learning community through convening's sponsored by Thrive by Five, is an additional resource from a related Washington State effort using the Racial Equity Theory of Change. We recommend reviewing elements of this document for examples of language for the racial equity narrative and opportunities for alignment.