



ENGAGING FAMILIES WITH MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH

OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 2025, a group of 12 school districts from different parts of Oregon began working with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). These 12 districts are the third group of districts to take part in ODE's English Learner Outcomes Program (ELOP). Through the program, ODE supports groups districts over four years to improve outcomes for multilingual students who are English learners.

ODE and the 12 districts partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table in 2025 to hear from districts' families and their multilingual students who are learning English in their school. Input from families and students will help districts make decisions about what to do to support families and students to improve outcomes for students. OKT and the districts used different ways to hear from people in each district. We gave each district a report about what their families and students shared.

This report is a summary of what we heard from all of the families and students in the 12 districts.

ABOUT OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE

OKT is part of Portland State University. OKT works to give all people a voice in public decisions. We talk with people who usually aren't included in these decisions. We help people discuss state, local, and regional issues. We use many ways and many languages to learn what people think and experience. And we value the wide range of ideas and experiences that people have. What people share influences the decisions that impact their lives.

HOW WE HEARD FROM PEOPLE

We used different ways to hear from families and students. In some districts, we used a couple of ways at different times of the year. In other districts, we only used one way. These include:

- Phone interviews
- Online survey
- Discussions with people at school and district events
- Gatherings and discussion for families with multilingual students
- Discussions with families at a Migrant Education Program gathering
- Discussions with people over Zoom

We used the following tools to tell people about events, gatherings, and ways to give their input:

- Text messages
- Phone calls
- Email
- In-person outreach at schools
- School or district communication apps
- Flyers sent home with students

WHAT WE ASKED PEOPLE ABOUT

First, we told people about their district's work with ODE and ELOP to improve outcomes for students. We also told people that their district wants to hear from families and students about their experiences and what they think will support families and students. We worked with each district to come up with a set of questions to ask people. Many districts wanted to hear from people on the same kinds of topics. We often asked people about the following:

- What families and students value about their school communities
- What could help students to have more regular attendance at school and in class
- What academic or learning support or resources families want to see
- What families would like to have from their district or school that would help them connect with their school community
- How people want to participate in district or school events, activities, and decisions
- What the best ways are for schools to communicate with people

During discussions and family gatherings, we encouraged people to share their thoughts and learn from each other. We also always asked people in every setting what their hopes for their children or for themselves as students are.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

We heard from about 650 people who have some experience with English learning services at their school. We heard from both caregivers and students from kindergarten through high school. Many of the people we heard from attended an event or family gathering in person. Most of the families speak Spanish as their first language. We also heard from some caregivers who speak English, Filipino, Russian, and Somali.

We also had many discussions with district and school leaders, staff, and teachers. Educators told us about their experiences with ELOP. They also shared what they thought could help them to be able to support their families and students.

WHAT WE HEARD

Families, students, and educators shared similar experiences and ideas about some topics. We heard that many of the same things are important to many people across the 12 ELOP districts.

What We Heard about Connections and Communications

- Families and educators like and want to have strong connections and relationships. They want more time and resources for events and activities that support connecting.
- Many people want more multilingual school and district staff and trusted points of contact to support families.
- Feeling connected, valued, and respected is important to many families.
- Many people want districtwide community events to be more inviting for families with multilingual students.
- Families want more clear and consistent multilingual communications. People appreciate interpretation services - even if they are on Zoom or by phone. But people think in-person interpretation is important.
- Some communities have more safety concerns now. Some people only feel safe to go their children's schools. Other people do not feel safe enough to go out at all.

What We Heard about Academic Support and Resources

- Many families have questions and are unsure about how English Language Development (ELD) programs and services work in their district and school.

- There are more questions and people are more unsure when schools have language immersion programs or students get Special Education services.
- People want to better understand what it looks like for their student to get ELD services during the school day.
 - Families believe celebrating multilingualism and language learning for the whole family would help support student learning. They also think that would help families and students feel more of a sense of belonging in their school communities.
 - Many families, students, and districts think that more support and resources for math would be helpful. We heard this mostly about math in middle and high school.

What We Heard about More Regular Attendance

Right now, more regular attendance is a goal for many districts. Some ELOP districts wanted to hear from families about regular attendance.

- It is clear that families and schools need a lot of different support for more regular attendance.
- Many people talked about transportation issues. People told us about challenges with bus routes and bus schedules.
- We also heard that caregiver's work schedules conflict with the start of the school day. There are not many options for care before school.
- Both families and students think that more hands-on learning would help students to attend school and classes. They also think seeing how classroom learning applies to careers, jobs, or college would help.

What We Heard from Families with Students in Virtual Schools

Three of the districts have virtual public charter schools where multilingual students are learning English online. We heard many similar things from families with students learning online as from families with students learning in-person. Families,

students, and educators also value the connections and relationships they have. Families like how responsive their students' teachers are.

There are also some things that we heard just from families with students who attend one of the virtual schools.

- Many families like that virtual schools are flexible. They like that students can attend class or do schoolwork at different times of the day. They think this helps them with regular attendance.
- Some caregivers find it hard to use the online tools and platforms. They often aren't sure where to find information or help in their preferred languages. Caregivers then don't feel connected to what their student is learning.
- Virtual schools don't have physical gathering spaces that families go to regularly. We also heard from educators that student enrollment can change a lot throughout the year. This can make it even harder to engage families.
- Many families want to see more opportunities for in-person events. They like in-person field trips or gatherings so they can meet teachers, students, and other families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what we heard, we recommend ODE to do the following to help support ELOP districts, schools, families, and students:

- Support districts with multilingual staff and people that families trust and can go to for support in their own language.
- Give ELOP districts flexible ways to engage families during the four years they are in the program.
- Keep giving districts different kinds of support to hear from their families and students.
- Give districts examples and ideas from past ELOP districts about ways to engage their families.

- Partner with districts to create more clear ways to tell families in plain language about what ELD programs and services look like during the school day.
- Partner with districts to give families and students more help in areas like math and hands-on learning.

CONCLUSION

We heard from many families eager to support their students' learning at home. Caregivers want more bilingual resources about homework and schoolwork from their districts. They also want more opportunities for the whole family to learn English language or other topics together. The district and school partners we worked with care deeply about supporting their families and students. They want to create more way for families to be involved in their school communities. We encourage our district partners to keep engaging their families and students. And we encourage ODE and district partners to keep talking to and learning from each other.