



Community Conversations: Early Learning Transition Check In



Oregon's Kitchen Table
Summary Report
January 2023



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In fall 2022, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Early Learning Division (ELD) worked with Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) to conduct a community engagement process to hear from families and educators who participated in “family interviews,” a pilot approach to support students’ transitions into kindergarten. OKT designed and hosted “community conversations” with people who had been part of the ODE family interviews in 2022. The goal of the community conversations conducted by OKT was: 1) to hear what people’s experiences in the family interviews were like, 2) to hear what ideas people had for future family interviews, and 3) to understand how families and educators think the process might work better for families and schools in coming years. This report provides an overview of the engagement process as well as high level findings. The report contains nine sections:

- Executive summary
- Project goals and design
- Perspectives on the value of the Family Interviews for families and educators
- Perspectives on the questions used in the family interviews
- Feedback on communications at different phases of the process
- Perspectives and suggestions regarding the format or setting of the family interviews
- Recommendations
- Brief conclusion
- Appendices including materials used in the community conversations

About Oregon’s Kitchen Table

Oregon’s Kitchen Table is a program of the National Policy Consensus Center in the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University, which was created by a group of non-partisan, non-profit community organizations dedicated to helping Oregonians have a voice in public decision-making. We are committed to engaging community members from all walks of life – particularly communities that typically have not been represented or engaged in public processes - to achieve deep engagement. We work with organizers, translators, and interpreters so materials and gatherings are available for Oregonians who speak a wide variety of languages and learn in a variety of ways. We recognize that people bring all different levels of knowledge

and familiarity regarding issues / policies. We use approaches to ensure those who may not have as in-depth knowledge can still respond and share what they believe and have experienced.

Outreach and Engagement

The OKT meetings included sixteen community conversations and three individual interviews with people involved in the ODE family interviews. OKT heard from 118 people in these meetings. The schools in the pilot project used OKT materials to invite families to the community conversations. OKT directly invited school staff and teachers who had conducted the family interviews, supported or scheduled the interviews.

Findings: Commonly Held Values and Beliefs

Across the community conversations and individual interviews, the following commonly held values and beliefs emerged:

- **People value connection and opportunities to share**
 - Families and educators **both value connection.**
 - Families value the **opportunity to share about their children.** They want educators to know how their children learn and what help they need to learn.
 - Many families and educators feel the family interviews help families who are new to school **feel that school is a safe, welcoming place.**
 - Many educators and families would like **ongoing opportunities** for families and educators to connect and share what they think.
 - Educators and families said the family interviews **help teachers learn** about their new students and families. The interviews also help teachers prepare for how to support their new students.

- **People have communication and resource needs**
 - People said that **support for many languages is important** in the family interviews. This support helps families understand about starting kindergarten. It also helps them get to know teachers and others at school.
 - Educators would like **more translation and interpretation help.**
 - Educators said it is **hard to find time** to plan and do the family interviews.

- Families and teachers said that family interviews need to be **private and confidential**.
- **People want more information**
 - Many families would like **more information** to prepare them for the family interviews.
 - Families and educators want to know **how information from family interviews will be used**. They especially want to know how information about services that students used before kindergarten will be used.
 - Families and educators would like **clearer questions** about services that students used before kindergarten. They would like examples.

Findings: Areas of Disagreement

There were, however, some areas where people held different values and beliefs. These include:

- **People disagreed about whether the student should be at the interview.**
Some people felt it would be good for the student and teacher to meet at the interview. Others did not want to share information about their child with the teacher.
- **People had different feelings about interview questions about services that students used before kindergarten.**
Some families found those questions useful for their child. Some families felt the questions were intrusive.
- Some people asked for **interview questions about family or household units**. They thought questions like these could help teachers be able to help students better.
- **People had different ideas about the best format for family interviews.**
Most families said that they liked meeting with the teacher in person in the classroom. Others said they preferred a different format or a combination of formats. Some people wanted to be able to talk to the teacher over the phone. Some people wanted to be able to respond to the questions in writing and then meet with the teacher in person.

Recommendations

As ODE and ELD continue to adjust the family interviews for next year, we recommend that staff and partners pay particular attention to the following recommendations, based on what we heard:

- Ensure timely communication with educators and families.
- Put questions regarding pre-kindergarten care, programs, and services into context.
- Provide opportunities for follow-up with families.
- Strengthen culturally-specific outreach to families.

We also recommend the following considerations in continuing to build meaningful connections among families and educators:

- Continue to use future community conversations to connect families and educators at the start of kindergarten.
- Help families teach each other. Families who participate in family interviews one year could pass on what they learn to families who start school the next year.
- Help schools teach each other. Educators and schools who participate in family interviews during the first “pilot” years could pass on what they learn to schools who are new to using family interviews.

Conclusion

The people who took part in the family interviews and in the community conversations come from nine different schools. Their communities are very different from each other, but they all care about connecting as their children start kindergarten. People want to learn and hear from each other about their kindergarten students and how to best meet their needs. The family interviews can be a chance for children, families, educators, and school staff to start school with a feeling of joy.

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND DESIGN

Background

The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment was previously given each fall to entering kindergartners to assess three core areas of learning and development: early literacy, early math and interpersonal/self-regulation skills. Over the past couple of years, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and its Early Learning Division (ELD) have worked with Oregon communities to redesign the tool to better ensure a meaningful transition for students as they begin kindergarten and their K-12 experience. The redesigned “Early Learning Transition Check-In: A Collaborative Engagement with Community” included a pilot “family interview.” The family interviews were intended to meet the following goals:

- To collect a statewide snapshot of data about children and families as the children begin kindergarten
- To inform state-level decisions about Oregon’s early learning and care sector
- To meaningfully support families in building relationships with their kindergarten educators by inviting the families to share about their experiences before kindergarten.

After the family interviews were completed in fall 2022, ODE and ELD partnered with Oregon’s Kitchen Table to host “community conversations” among families from schools that had participated in the family interviews as well as with educators who had coordinated and conducted the family interviews. These community conversations will inform ODE and ELD as they continue redesigning the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment and continue to support relationships among families and between families and educators.

Engagement Goals

The goals of the Oregon’s Kitchen Table community conversations were as follows:

- To hear from as many families and educators as possible who participated in the family interview pilot
- To learn what experiences people had with the family interviews

- To understand what would help make future family interviews more welcoming, comfortable, and accessible for families
- To understand what resources, supports, and approaches might make it easier for schools and educators to coordinate and conduct the family interviews
- To build connections among families in kindergarten classrooms participating in the family interviews
- To identify any additional ideas that people think would improve the family interviews to support students as they enter kindergarten

Engagement Activities

Oregon's Kitchen Table conducted the following engagement activities from October to November 2022:

- Eleven in-person community conversations with families in English and Spanish
- Three virtual community conversations with families via Zoom in English and Spanish
- Two virtual community conversations with educators via Zoom
- Three individual interviews with families and educators who requested them

The in-person community conversations included the following:

- Food from local area restaurants
- Supervision and activities for children so parents or caregivers could more fully participate in the conversations
- English and Spanish speaking facilitators
- A Spanish speaking community liaison to welcome families.

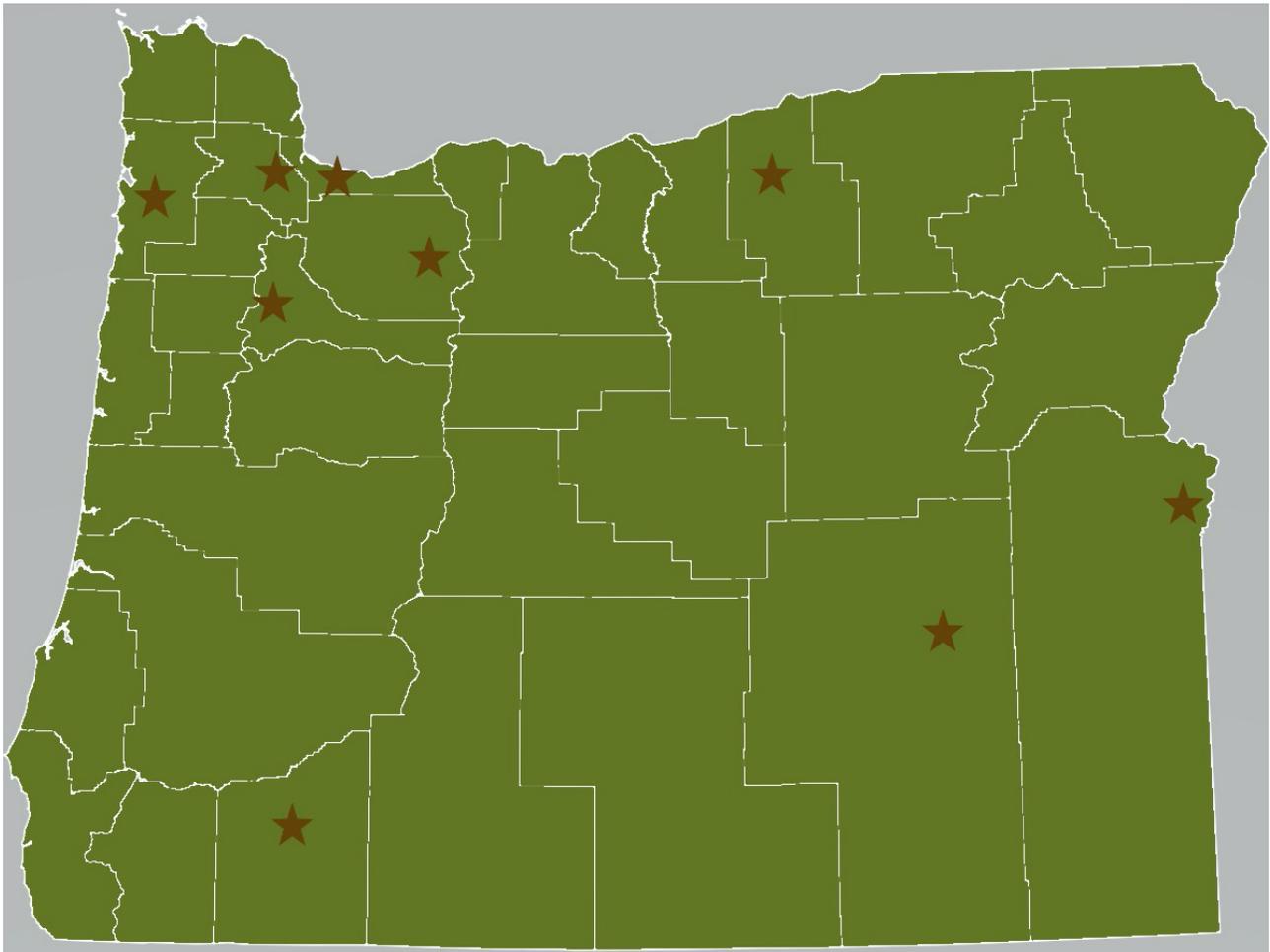
Oregon's Kitchen Table worked individually with each school to identify what language supports would be helpful for families. The virtual community conversations were provided as an option for schools with five or more participating classrooms and for schools that requested that format for accessibility. Oregon's Kitchen Table also responded to requests for individual interviews to

best meet preferences for privacy and access. Families and educators who took part in the community conversations and individual interviews received a \$100 stipend.

Participation

All nine of the schools that participated in the family interview 2022 pilot also participated in the community conversations. The schools were located across the state and included schools in rural areas, small cities, and large metropolitan areas. Three of the schools have bilingual programs. About half of the schools have a high number of families who speak a language other than English. Figure 1 shows the general areas where the nine schools are located.

Figure 1. Location of schools that participated in the community conversations



Stars on the Oregon map show the general locations of the nine schools that participated in the community conversations and interviews.

Overall, 114 people took part in the community conversations: ninety-four family members and twenty educators. Of those, approximately twenty-five family members indicated that they were from primarily Spanish speaking households. A few families also shared that their students experience a disability. Two to twenty-five people participated in a community conversation, and the majority of conversations had between five and seven participants.

3. FEEDBACK ABOUT THE VALUE OF THE FAMILY INTERVIEWS

During the community conversations, many of the families and educators reported that they valued the opportunity they'd had to share information about their children or to learn about their students during the family interviews. Several families shared that just being asked the questions made them feel like the teacher wanted to learn about their child and that the teacher would be prepared to have their child in the classroom and would meet their child's needs.

Many of the educators also expressed that they found the family interviews valuable because they provided an opportunity to learn about the children in their classes and to start to build relationships with families. Several educators thought that the family interviews helped them to understand what supports students might need. One educator shared that they were able to create a visual support for a student based on what they learned from the interview with that student's family. Another shared that they learned about the family's housing situation and were then able to provide connections to resources. We also heard from some educators that the multistep process of holding the family interviews, and then holding a community conversation with families about the effectiveness of the family interviews was valuable in building relationships between educators and families, and then building additional relationships among families and other school staff.

Family comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“Me sorprendio porque con ninguno de mis otros hijos me llamaron para hacerme estas preguntas de parte de un maestro, y este hijo que está en kindergarten es el terciño, y aunque ya la conozco a la maestra, nunca había estado tan cerca del niño.” (English: “Also surprised. Hadn’t called me for my other two kids. I know the teacher, but I’ve never been in relationship like this with them.”)

“I was nervous, but also excited to meet her and tell her about my child.”

“I think the holistic picture is so important to support a child’s ability to learn.”

“It was like, not having to ask for help, just getting help. Personal. It was about my child, not children in general, and working with you (the parent).”

“[My son] can’t always advocate for himself. This felt like an opportunity to advocate for him.”

“Y la maestra me dijo te voy a dar un cuestionario para conocer mejor a tu hijo, se me ocurrió que era muy buena idea, porque vienen de un periodo muy largo de COVID, porque mi hijo solo fue al Head Start por 2 meses presencial y todo el demás tiempo fue virtual, y me ayudo a saber cuales eran las virtudes y cuales eran las cosas en las que mi hijo puede tener más dificultades, y entonces sí me siento sorprendido y me siento bien de que la escuela se haya puesto en contacto conmigo para presentarme al maestro. Me sentí sorprendido porque no sabía de qué trataría. (English: “Thought it was a good idea, because my son is lost after this long period of COVID. My son only went to Head Start for two months in person and the rest of the time was virtual. It helped me to get to know what my son might have difficulties in. I feel surprised because I didn’t know what it was about and good that the school put me in contact to introduce me to the teacher.”)

“We’ve moved around a lot and this is the first time we’ve seen something like this. The teacher did something interesting. She explained the goals and asked if we were ok and understanding of that. The teacher informed us of what would be going on, and let our child know what their responsibility is going to be. Very engaging for the child and for us.”

“My child can be a little extra so can be a little challenging...good to be able to share with the teacher that she likes being the engine, not the caboose. These were the things we’ve been working on, etc.”

Educator comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“They helped me prepare. For any student that hadn’t been to school yet at all, I knew I needed to make sure to connect so they felt more comfortable, like making sure I put a sticker on their hand, for example. I learned I had 3 students who were coming in and didn’t speak any English.”

“For a kid with an IEP, had they walked in the door the first day, I wouldn’t have known what to do from the start. Having that time with her mom and being able to relay information from the start and be able to let her know to join my Dojo Class.”

“Engagement with parents or caregivers is a better avenue to gain trust and a collaborating spirit about bringing up this child in the best environment possible for learning.”

“From our community standpoint - I think you learn so much about your families when you do something as simplistic as this. What parent doesn’t want to tell you about their child?”

“I thought this was going to be totally academic. It was refreshing to do an interview about the kids themselves and connecting.”

“For my school, the questions were good to get to know the families together. Some are first time parents and they don’t know how to communicate or how to go around the school.”

“There was not enough time to inform families about the interview. It was a last minute thing. It was not clear for all families what the interview was about, especially because the information was via text message.”

4. PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Overall Impressions of Questions

Most families shared appreciation for the interview questions, particularly those that focused on their child’s interests, personality, and learning styles. Families shared that they liked the open-ended nature of the questions, which they thought contributed to a conversational feel rather than a more formal interview. Several commented that it didn’t feel like an interview at all but, as one person said, it was “like I was talking to a friend.” Others noted that they thought there was a lot of

opportunity for the family interviews to feel even more conversational and would hope they could continue to evolve in that direction. Many families were eager to provide suggestions for reframing questions or adding questions. The Oregon's Kitchen Table team noticed a lot of enthusiasm for the use of questions that focus on a student's personality and interests as well as questions that provide more specific direction or examples to help people understand what ODE and ELD are hoping to learn about.

Family comments from community conversations (excerpts)

"I feel like this covered it pretty good. We ask these similar questions in my day care. I think it is good for any person caring for your child to know these things. Especially what services and program, or where has the child been, like being home with parents versus child care settings."

"For me, most of the questions are positive. There are kind of open-ended questions at the end. Add some questions about challenges, what does your child have difficulties with? The other side of the coin."

"The questions felt more geared toward low income families or seeking out the "status" of the students or families."

"I did like the question of what brings my child joy. I felt like I was able to let my student's teacher learn about my child specifically."

"Yo muy bien porque me preguntó sobre todo lo que le gusta al niño, como lo puede ayudar, que puede hacer, que cosas quiero para mi hijo que quiero que aprenda, o que es lo principal, en mi caso yo le dije que para mi la prioridad es que aprenda inglés, porque mi hijo no sabe el idioma." (English: "I feel very good because she asked me about everything that my son likes and how she can help him. I told her my priority is that my son learns English.")

"If the questions were more geared toward actual kindergarteners and their needs and interests from the parent's perspective I would absolutely participate again. Questions such as: Does your student have a preferred learning style? What is your child motivated by? Does your child have specific needs to help her regulate if she has a struggle? Does your child seem to be interested in any academic subject more than another?"

There were a couple of aspects of the questions that families and educators both expressed dissatisfaction or confusion about.

- Overall, some families reported finding the questions were redundant as they had already answered similar questions at other points in their school’s orientation process. As one person said, “It’s important to not feel like we’re being asked the same questions. If there are any changes to questions, make sure that it’s not already asked somewhere else.” Some families also shared that the question about a child’s “hopes and dreams” was too vague and difficult to answer at the beginning of the school year.
- Families also wished that more of the questions would have been focused on their child’s learning style and interests. Some families reported that they appreciated that the teacher did ask additional questions related to learning styles and interests.
- Several families and educators recommended adding a question around the makeup of family or household units. At the same time, parents also cautioned that it would be important to them to be able to share a response to a question like this in private, without their child or even other family members present.

Questions Related to Pre-Kindergarten Care, Programs, and Services

The questions that families and educators expressed most confusion and discomfort with were those around the types of care, programs, and services that the families had used before kindergarten. Several families, especially in the community conversations held in rural areas, found this set of questions intrusive. Some also mentioned that they felt judged by this question, particularly if their child hadn’t attended any type of group care or preschool before kindergarten. As one parent said, “As a stay-at-home mom, does it mean that anything that he didn’t develop—did I do something? Is he seen as coming in missing something because of that setting?” Many families reported being confused as to what “programs and services” referred to. Educators also offered similar feedback, and suggested providing examples of such programs and services for families to reference. Another educator suggested offering these questions on a form for families with checkboxes next to a list of programs and services and focusing the conversation time during family interviews on open-ended questions.

In one specific example, a Spanish-speaking parent expressed frustration that, in her interview, she didn’t think she had an opportunity to share that her child receives speech and language services from the county. For this parent, the questions on “programs and services” didn’t seem to be referring to speech and language specifically. Another person said that even the last question asking

“Is there anything else you want me to know?” didn’t provide a clear enough opportunity to share. They said, “At the very end that by that point after the other questions asked, you’re not thinking about any special needs your child might have. Maybe put in a question specifically for special needs, learning disabilities, or anything around a kid who might be non-neurotypical.” Another parent shared that by the end they felt frazzled and had a hard time identifying in the moment what they “might have missed in responding to other questions.”

Some families, especially families with a kindergartener who experiences a disability, felt grateful for the “programs and services” question, as it allowed them an opportunity to discuss specific needs in the classroom. Educators also pointed to the importance of learning about how they could use responses to these questions to support students who experience a disability.

Flexible vs Prescriptive Questions

In the conversations with educators, many of them wanted to understand how flexible the questions were, and whether they could veer off script as long as they got to the root of the questions. Educators expressed wanting this flexibility to allow for a more natural conversation. One staff person who assisted a teacher in conducting interviews in Spanish felt that it was a challenge to navigate how much they needed to stay on the script provided by ODE or how much they could rephrase questions, particularly the translations in Spanish. One educator suggested that ODE and ELD consider providing a set of topics that the family interviews need to cover and offer suggestions for types of questions but allow flexibility in how educators phrase or pose those questions. We heard from several families a similar desire for more flexibility in how the questions or conversations are phrased. They shared that they felt some discomfort during the family interviews because they could tell that the educator had a script or prescribed set of questions they were trying to complete.

Some educators also recommended including a combination of flexible and checklist style questions, particularly for those questions about programs and services. The checklist could be provided to families ahead of time as well as during the family interviews. The time during the interview could then be focused on other questions, and families would have some more space and time to talk about what they most want to share with the teacher.

Educator comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“We had to follow the script provided for the ODE questionnaire. Sometimes during the interview that felt awkward. An awkward interaction with families.”

“The question about ‘programs’ available for children was a confusing question. It could be framed as an open-ended question for parents. Most of the parents did not know about the names of the programs or if they were part of them. Parents were not familiar with the programs.”

“There was not a question to learn about kids’ background, for example to know about students’ experience with crayons, board games, etc., or other important skills information useful for kindergarten.”

“As a translator, even if I’m translating word-for-word, I’d make suggestions. Having to follow the script was hard. I wanted to tell more than what was on the script.”

“I would have liked to ask about their family situation. That’s not something that people always put on their paperwork for school. One caregiver said in the interview, ‘I am her grandmother. We’ve raised her since she was an infant. Both parents are incarcerated.’ Being able to ask what the household looks like is important to be able to understand where a child is coming from.”

5. COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT FAMILY INTERVIEWS

Communication about family interviews was highly variable depending on individual schools. Some families reported that the communication around the process was smooth and accessible, while other families reported being confused about the process and feeling unsure what they were going into during the interview. Many educators reported using a combination of particular communication-focused computer applications and or phone calls with families. Still, some educators reported that reaching all parents was challenging and they would like support and clear guidance about reaching the goal of connecting to every family to at least offer the family interview. Some families also reported that they weren’t sure if all families received information about the family interviews, particularly families who speak a language other than English at home.

We did hear a couple of unique perspectives from families who enrolled after the start of school or who came from outside the school district that communication around the family interviews was

confusing, particularly regarding the purpose of the interviews. These families were able to participate in some form in the family interviews, with the families who enrolled late reporting they were able to email or fill out a paper form in response to the questions. One of these parents said that the opportunity to respond at all was more than the family had experienced in their previous school setting.

Educators also expressed wanting stronger guidelines around communication with families. Many teachers used their personal time to communicate with families and felt that the scheduling process was confusing and rushed. One educator shared that they were able to meet the parents two times early on in the school year, first at an open house, which was useful to inform parents about the family interviews, and then at the family interviews.

Family comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“It would be good for preparing our kids to know that there may be a question or two that would be posed to them. That was a surprise to my son. The teacher was very sweet about it, but he was still caught off guard—having a printout and a direction to be prepared ahead of the meeting would be helpful, including preparing the kids.”

“Set the expectation of what we were walking into. I thought we would meet the teacher, walk around the room. Get a more targeted agenda than this.”

“La comunicación y la situación es muy buena, mi hija tiene muy buena comunicación con su maestra y además la aplicación que descargo puedo hablar directamente con la maestra, si falta algo le pregunto y me contesta y yo le contesto, y lo mejor es que yo lo puedo poner en español y ella en inglés. En mi caso mi hija si tiene muy buena comunicación con la maestra y yo si me reúno con ella.” (English: “Communication around the situation is very good. My daughter has a good communication with her teacher. We use an app to communicate and there is a back and forth of messages through the app. The best thing is I can write in Spanish and she can write in English.”)

“La entrevista telefónica me pareció bien y cuando llegué la conocí a la maestra, casi no la molesté, duré poco, pero me gusta que la profesora también hable español, porque yo no sé nada de inglés.” (English: “The interview was by phone. It was ok. When I arrived, I got to know the teacher. I didn’t say much but I liked that the teacher also speaks Spanish, because I don’t speak English.”)

Interpretation and Translation Services

Many families who speak English as a second language or don't speak English at all reported that the process was very confusing, and they would have liked more communication around what the family interviews were, what to expect, and what the purpose was. They wanted to ensure that interpretation was considered before the interview process. Several families said they did not know whether interpreters would be available, and would prefer knowing this ahead of time. Educators in some schools also shared that communicating about all aspects of the family interviews with families who spoke a language other than English was challenging and they would like more support or resources from ODE and ELD to be able to meet interpretation needs. Some schools were able to create teams with bilingual staff who fill a variety of roles in the school. For example, in one school, a school secretary who is bilingual in English and Spanish had a key role in scheduling with families and in working alongside the kindergarten teacher to conduct the family interviews over the phone.

Communication about Purpose of Interviews

In general, families and educators want a better understanding of the purpose of the interviews, and how the information provided in the interview would be used by the school and ODE or both for decision making. Families want to understand who would be looking at this information, and how it might impact their students. Some families also reported that, if they knew these interviews were part of a state program, they would have put more effort into answering the questions. Educators also wanted to better understand how information collected during the interviews will be used at the state level.

Communication about Interview Questions

There was a strong consensus among families that they would prefer to receive the questions ahead of time. Some families did receive the questions via email or mail, and some families did not see the questions until the interview. Families want to know the questions ahead of time to better prepare their responses. Some families shared they felt they were “put on the spot” during the interview.

Follow-up Communications

Many families wanted some follow-up communication after the family interview. Some suggested continuing the conversations from the family interviews during follow up at a later date. We most frequently heard this from families who responded to the family interview questions via email or paper. Several families who met the teacher in person with their child also said that they want an option on a form with the questions to respond “please discuss later” to certain questions as they didn’t want to share some topics while the child could hear.

Feedback on Materials and Resources from ODE

ODE was interested in learning what educators found helpful in the materials and resources that ODE provided, including interview scripts and protocols, training videos, and FAQs, among others. They were also interested in hearing what additional materials or resources educators would like to have for conducting the interviews.

Many educators reported satisfaction with the resources provided to prepare for the interviews, finding the material straightforward. One educator reported that they would prefer a live webinar or Zoom session to prepare for the interview, so that questions could be answered in real time. We most frequently heard educators who conducted the interviews share a desire for earlier communications from ODE and ELD about the process. School and district leadership shared a similar desire. Several educators shared that they appreciated ongoing communications with ODE and ELD as they prepared for and implemented the family interviews as well as when they navigated entering the interview information into ODE’s platform.

Some educators desired stronger communication around the roles of school staff in the process, such as a school secretary, the teacher, and the principal. Individual schools utilized staff in different ways during the process. We heard from some educators that they would like to have clearer communication from either their schools or guidance from ODE and ELD about the roles that different school staff could play.

6. FEEDBACK ABOUT FAMILY INTERVIEW DESIGN

When educators and families were asked whether they would participate in the family interviews again if invited, many responded that they would. However, both groups expressed a desire for several adjustments to interview design.

Interview Formats

Families and educators reported participating in a variety of family interview formats used across the nine participating schools as well as across individual schools and classrooms. Those formats included the following:

- In person in the classroom during an existing time that the school already had in place for kindergarten orientation or meetings between families and educators
- In person in the classroom during times scheduled specifically for the family interviews
- By phone at a time school staff scheduled with parents (sometimes with an interpreter depending on language needs)
- Via email or paper format as a questionnaire sent by the school or teacher to families
- Via email or paper format as a questionnaire in combination with an in-person interview in the classroom

Some educators shared that format decisions were either made at an administrative level or that they were following ODE directives.

It is notable that families whose family interviews involved meeting in person or talking over the phone with the teacher seemed more satisfied overall with the experience than families whose family interview involved completing a form or communicating over email. The latter families felt more uncertainty about the purpose of the family interview and less connected to the teacher or school. While many of those parents said they would have appreciated the opportunity to meet in person with their child's teacher, they also agreed that simply being able to convey information about their child in response to the family interview questions had value regardless of the interview format.

For those families who spoke to the teacher over the phone or met with the teacher in person, that interaction helped them feel more comfortable and reassured about where their child would be learning. Several families who were able to bring their child with them to meet the teacher and visit the classroom also said that they thought the meeting helped their child feel more confident about entering kindergarten.

Of note, we heard of circumstances at two schools that we think are important for ODE and ELD to consider as they more broadly implement family interviews. At both schools, the teacher who conducted the family interviews didn't end up being the classroom teacher for several of the students. At one school this was due to a staffing change early in the school year. At another school this was due to the timing of the interviews and when classroom rosters were finalized. Regarding both situations, we heard that it was challenging for families not to connect with their child's actual teacher. In conversations with these families, we heard that the family interviews seemed less valuable for them. One family said, "That uncertainty [about who the child's teacher would be] undermined the process or the purpose of doing the interviews in the first place."

Interview Timing

Educators reported that there were timing challenges in the interview process. They reported a need for more time for the school to plan how and when to hold the family interviews, time for families and teachers to prepare for the family interviews, and dedicated time for teachers and staff to communicate with families and to schedule family interviews. Interviews varied in length, and many families suggested that they would like the interviews to be twenty to thirty minutes long.

Educators or schools also felt they had time challenges with what they had to accomplish in the beginning of the 2022 school year. Families would like to see the family interviews happen before the start of the school year in order to ease any concerns that families and students might have about starting kindergarten. Families who participated in family interviews after the first days of school thought it would be helpful earlier since those first days are often intimidating and chaotic for kids and families. One mother shared that she liked being able to meet the teacher in person with her daughter and see the schoolroom before the school year started because of the long bus commute her child has to kindergarten. She felt some of her worries about that commute and long day were eased because of the meeting.

Interview Setting

Overall, families shared a desire to have a variety of options for settings for the family interviews so that they could choose what would make them most comfortable. Many families preferred an in-person option. Only a couple of families said they would prefer meeting with the educator for the interview in their own home. Many people said they were comfortable meeting at the school and that the opportunity to see the classroom was also important. A few families said they would prefer to talk by phone or by Zoom in order to preserve privacy and confidentiality, including the ability to talk openly about their child without the child hearing. One family shared that they felt both they and the teacher seemed uncomfortable because of how hot the room was at the end of August or beginning of September.

Some families discussed the possibility of a two-part family interview, with the child attending only part of the interview. One person suggested, “Maybe provide some sort of childcare during the interview so the parent can have some time separately with the teacher. You could maybe have a sack lunch table where an aide can take kids or give a tour of the school or visit a room like the library.”

Family comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“I own a business, I had to do zoom from my job as there is no way I can get away. It would be helpful in the future to have more slots in the evening available for working parents.”

“For kids who have transitional issues, I think a home visit option would really be life altering – “this person has actually been in my home!””

“These are really important questions. They shouldn’t just send them out, knowing that not everyone will see them or fill them out on their own. I wished they would have called us, or asked us to come to sit down and talk about them for a few minutes in person. I would have come. Instead, they send them over email or in a folder with a lot of other materials and they get lost.”

“Having more time would be good. The conferences were only 20 minutes, and if the teacher was already running late with another set of parents, then that takes away from your time. It felt really rushed. It’s nice that it was in person, but it was too short a timeframe.”

Family comments from community conversations (excerpts)

“Having more time would be good. The conferences were only 20 minutes, and if the teacher was already running late with another set of parents, then that takes away from your time. It felt really rushed. It’s nice that it was in person, but it was too short a timeframe.”

“Me gustaría que hubiera dos entrevistas, una solo con los padres y otra para traer al hijo..” (English: "I would like there to be two interviews, one only with the parents and another to bring the child.")

“What if we could fill something out before school, teachers reviewed, then met in-person after being in school a little while? Might be helpful.”

“I would have liked it more if we had these interviews before school started.”

“En lo personal, no tuve una buena interacción con el maestro, y no porque el maestro fuera malo, sino porque mis expectativas hacia la escuela eran un poco más altas, así que ese día que conocimos al maestro, hacía mucho calor en el cuarto, la maestra estaba incomoda, se podía sentir que había una flexión con la maestra, y ella hacia todo lo posible por ayudarnos, y tú miras esa incomodidad de ella, porque estar en un salón a 80 grados eso es incómodo, esa fue nuestra interacción con el profesor.” (English: “The day we met the teacher, the school was super warm and the teacher was uncomfortable. Could feel there was tension with the teacher and she was doing everything she could do to help us but being in that classroom that was 80 degrees was super uncomfortable. The setting wasn’t good.”)

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

As described above, families and educators provided many ideas for improving the family interview process. Many were ideas that educators and families had in common. As ODE and ELD continue to adjust the family interviews for next year, we recommend that staff and partners pay particular attention to the following recommendations, based on what we heard:

1. Ensure timely communication with educators and families.

- Consider timing and frequency of communications with schools and educators.

- Consider timing and frequency of communications with families.
- Develop specific communications about the purpose of the family interviews and how the information will be used.

2. Put questions regarding pre-kindergarten care, programs, and services into context.

- Carefully consider how questions about pre-kindergarten care, programs, and services are posed. Refine as necessary.
- Consider providing examples of such programs or services to help families understand the questions.
- Explain the purpose of these questions and how the information will be used.

3. Provide opportunities for follow-up with families.

Carefully consider models for following up with families after the family interviews, particularly a process for revisiting interview questions later in the school year. Work with schools to implement these follow-up processes.

4. Strengthen culturally-specific outreach to families.

We frequently heard that culturally-specific outreach made families feel welcome, and that it is important to them. We heard from several Spanish speaking families that they didn't always receive information that was clear to them. We recommend that ODE and ELD consider developing materials to support schools in doing culturally appropriate and welcoming outreach to families. One approach to consider is to involve Spanish speaking families who participated in the pilot family interviews in partnering with other Spanish speaking families who are entering the family interview process.

In addition to collecting feedback from participants about the family interviews themselves, the community conversations that Oregon's Kitchen Table hosted were designed to continue to build relationships in the school community, particularly among families in kindergarten classes. We heard from educators and families that these events were valuable in creating that opportunity. One family said during the conversation, "This is nicer, what we're doing here tonight, walking through this." One staff member said, "We had some families say when they came into the school [for the community conversation], 'I liked that reunion where we got to come in and talk to people.'"

Some schools saw the pairing of the family interviews and the community conversations as the first step in creating ongoing opportunities for community engagement in their schools. One principal shared, “One thing that came out of the feedback session [community conversation] was how much they loved being in the room with each other. We had a family night but what was different was the talking with each other rather than us delivering information. They got to connect with one another. I heard them asking each other for their numbers. One of my biggest takeaways is their desire for connection.”

Based on feedback directly related to the community conversations and fostering connection, we recommend the following approaches for future connection and engagement:

1. Support families in teaching each other

We recommend that ODE, ELD, and participating schools consider how families who participate in family interviews one year could pass on what they learn to families who start school the next year. In this way, new parents could be prepared for the family interviews and starting kindergarten. Families could also build new connections with other families.

2. Help schools teach each other

We recommend that ODE and ELD consider how educators and schools who participate in family interviews during the first “pilot” years could pass on what they learn to schools who are new to using family interviews. In this way, new schools could be prepared for how to plan for the family interviews. Schools who have already tried out the family interviews could share what worked or didn’t work for them.

3. Foster broader community connections through community conversations.

As ODE and ELD continue to shape future family interviews, we recommend they retain the overall goal of connecting families and educators. Many families and educators saw the goal even more broadly as connecting families with their school communities. In order to achieve that broader community connection, we suggest continuation of a community conversation component.

The community conversations can also continue to provide ongoing learning opportunities for schools, ODE, and ELD to adapt and improve the family interviews and the kindergarten transition process. We recommend the following changes to the format of future community conversations:

- Provide meals or refreshments for families as a way to support participation and create a warm, welcoming environment.
- Focus the conversations to give families time and space to share their feedback, thoughts, and ideas. Families may be most comfortable having private time and space without school staff present for all or parts of the conversation.
- Offer spaces for families to converse in their preferred language. This may mean holding separate conversations in different languages. The community conversation could begin with a shared meal and activity and then move into more separate spaces for families to talk with other families who speak their language.
- Consider posing only a couple of questions to guide conversation and allowing time for more informal interactions among families.

8. CONCLUSION

Throughout this Oregon's Kitchen Table community engagement effort, which sought input from families and educators who participated in the pilot family interviews, people shared a range of experiences and ideas about how to improve future family interviews. One thing that stands out from the community conversations is that educators and families really valued the opportunity for connection with each other, with other families, and with the broader school community. Even as they suggested improvements for future family interviews, people expressed a strong desire to learn and hear from each other about their kindergarten students and about how best to meet their children's needs while creating a positive learning environment.

During both educator conversations we heard teachers, administrators, and school staff celebrate the number of families who wanted to participate in the family interviews. We heard their gratitude for their colleagues in the midst of many challenges at the start of the school year. Across the community conversations we heard families eager for the opportunity to celebrate their child's individual needs, joys, and personalities. And, most inspiring, we saw families make connections with each other, and heard educators plan for how to continue to foster an inclusive, connected school community



APPENDIX A. Background Materials for Community Conversations

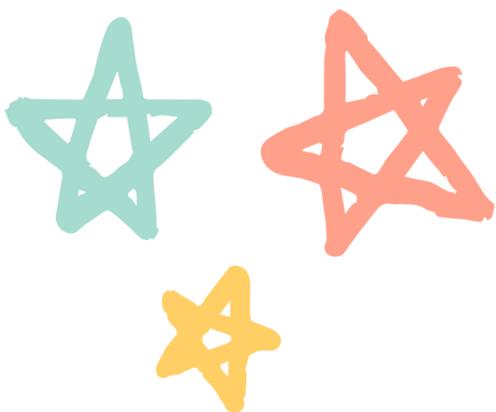
English and Spanish versions of:

- Purpose of family interviews
- Questions used in family interviews

Why are we doing Family Interviews?



Learn what is happening with children and families all over the state as they begin kindergarten



Bring what we learn to make decisions about Oregon's Early Learning at all levels - local, regional, and state.



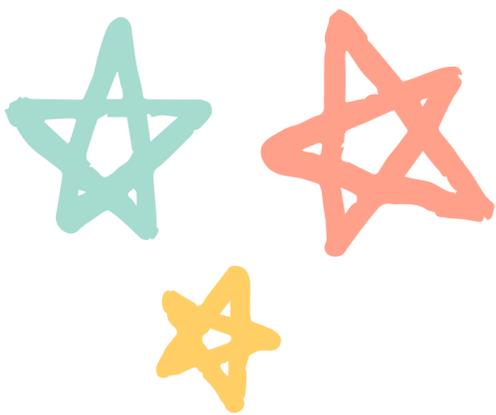
Support families and kindergarten educators connect

To learn more, visit oregonearlylearning.com/PreKCheckin or email questions to PreKCheckin@ode.oregon.gov.

¿Por qué estamos realizando las entrevistas familiares?



Recopilar datos del panorama estatal sobre los niños y las familias al iniciar kindergarten



Informar las decisiones locales, regionales y estatales sobre el aprendizaje temprano de Oregón



Brindar la oportunidad de apoyar significativamente a las familias en la construcción de relaciones con sus educadores de jardín de infantes

Aprenda más: Información sobre las Entrevistas Familiares: visite oregonearlylearning.com/PreKCheckin.

PREGUNTAS DE LA ENTREVISTA FAMILIAR:

- ¿Cuáles son sus esperanzas y sueños para su hijo/a este año escolar?
- ¿Qué le trae alegría a su hijo/a?
- ¿Qué tipo de cuidado infantil tenía su familia para su hijo/a?
- ¿Qué programas y/o servicios recibió o en que programas participó su hijo/a para ayudarlo a aprender y crecer?
- De los programas y/o servicios que acaba de mencionar, ¿cuál diría que fue el más útil para su hijo/a y su familia?
- ¿Qué programas o servicios le gustaría que su hijo/a hubiera recibido?
- ¿Qué más le gustaría que supiera y entendiera sobre su hijo/a o su familia?

FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- What are your hopes and dreams for your child this school year?
- What brings your child joy?
- What kinds of child care did your family have for your child?
- What programs and/or services did your child receive or participate in to help them learn and grow?
- Of the programs and/or services you just mentioned, which one would you say was the most helpful to your child and your family?
- Which programs and/or services do you wish your child had received?
- What else would you like for me to know and understand about your child or your family?



APPENDIX B. Agenda and Questions for Family Community Conversations

English and Spanish versions of:

- Agenda
- Questions to guide conversation

Our Conversation Today

- Welcome!
- Information
- How our conversation will go today
- Talk about three main topics
- Thank you!



How did you feel during that first interaction with your child's teacher?

How did you feel about the questions the teacher asked?

How would you design this process for the next group of families?

Nuestra conversación de hoy

- ¡Bienvenidos!
- Información
- Cómo se desarrollará nuestra conversación en el día de hoy
- Hablar sobre tres temas principales
- ¡Muchas gracias!



¿Cómo se sintió con esa primer interacción con la maestra de sus niños?

¿Cómo se sintieron con las preguntas que les hizo la maestra?

¿Cómo diseñaría usted éste proceso para el próximo grupo de familias?

TOPIC 1:

HOW DID YOU FEEL DURING THAT FIRST INTERACTION WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER?

FOR EXAMPLE:

In what ways did the interview help you connect with your child's teacher?

What would make the interview process more comfortable and welcoming for you and your family?

TOPIC 2:

**HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE QUESTIONS THE
TEACHER ASKED?**

FOR EXAMPLE:

What worked well for you about the Family Interview questions? What didn't work well?

What questions do you wish you would have been asked during the Family Interview that would help with your child's transition to kindergarten?

TOPIC 3:

HOW WOULD YOU DESIGN THIS PROCESS FOR THE NEXT GROUP OF FAMILIES??

FOR EXAMPLE:

How could we make it easier for future families to participate?

Are there ways that the process could be designed to be more appropriate for children and families in your particular community?

PRIMER TEMA DE DISCUSIÓN:

¿CÓMO SE SINTIÓ CON ESTA PRIMERA INTERACCIÓN CON LA MAESTRA DE SUS NIÑOS?

POR EJEMPLO:

¿De qué manera le ayudó la entrevista a conectarse con la maestra de sus niños?

¿Qué haría el proceso de las entrevistas más cómodo y acogedor para ustedes y sus familias?

SEGUNDO TEMA DE DISCUSIÓN:

¿CÓMO SE SINTIERON CON LAS PREGUNTAS QUE LES HIZO LA MAESTRA?

POR EJEMPLO:

¿Qué funcionó bien para usted con las preguntas de las Entrevistas Familiares? ¿Qué fue lo que no funcionó?

¿Cuáles preguntas usted desearía haber preguntado durante las Entrevistas Familiares que le ayudarían con la transición de sus niños?

TERCER TEMA DE DISCUSIÓN:

¿CÓMO DISEÑARÍA USTED ÉSTE PROCESO PARA EL PRÓXIMO GRUPO DE FAMILIAS?

POR EJEMPLO:

¿Cómo lo podemos hacer más fácil para que las futuras familias participen?

¿Hay alguna manera en que el proceso pudiera ser diseñado para que sea más apropiado para los niños y las familias en su comunidad específica?



APPENDIX C. Agenda and Questions for Educator Community Conversations

- Agenda
- Questions to guide conversation for educators who conducted family interviews
- Questions to guide conversation for educators who supported or scheduled family interviews

EDUCATORS' CONVERSATION

OUR GOAL: TO HEAR AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER ABOUT EXPERIENCES WITH THE FAMILY INTERVIEWS AND IDEAS FOR HOW HOW TO MAKE THEM WORK BETTER FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS



BACKGROUND



WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION



BREAKOUTS BY ROLES DURING FAMILY INTERVIEW PROCESS



WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION



THANK YOU!



RESOURCES / MATERIALS FROM ODE

- Family Interview Training Powerpoint
- Sample Family Interview Schedules
- Sample Communication Letter to Families
- Sample Script to Schedule Family Interviews
- Fall 2022 Pilot: Family Interview Handout – multiple languages
- Family Interview Protocol and Script – English and Spanish
- Family Interview Questions – multiple languages
- Educator Family Interview Note Taking Form – English and Spanish
- Smartsheet Training Confirmation

TOPIC 1 FOR COORDINATORS

WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THESE FAMILY INTERVIEWS?

FOR EXAMPLE

So far, in what ways have you seen the interviews impacting your school overall?

Did you get any feedback from your staff who were conducting the interviews or from families who participated?

TOPIC 2 FOR COORDINATORS

DID YOUR SCHOOL ALREADY HAVE SPACE / APPROACHES IN PLACE TO CONNECT WITH FAMILIES? IF SO, HOW COULD THE FAMILY INTERVIEW BE EASILY INCORPORATED INTO WHAT ALREADY EXISTED?

FOR EXAMPLE

What challenges did you face in incorporating it into what already existed?

What benefits do you see in incorporating it into what already existed?

TOPIC 3 FOR COORDINATORS

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SUPPORTS, MATERIALS, OR RESOURCES YOU RECEIVED IN THIS PROCESS?

FOR EXAMPLE

Which letters, materials, recorded trainings, etc. from ODE were most helpful?

What additional supports / resources do you wish you had?

TOPIC 4 FOR COORDINATORS

IF THE FAMILY INTERVIEWS WERE OPTIONAL FOR YOUR SCHOOL / CLASSROOM, WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE?



TOPIC 1 FOR INTERVIEWERS

HOW DID YOU FEEL IN THESE FIRST INTERACTIONS WITH YOUR FAMILIES?

FOR EXAMPLE

How did the family interviews help you to establish relationships with your students and their families?

What are some new things you learned from families?
Anything that surprised you?

TOPIC 2 FOR INTERVIEWERS

SO FAR, HOW HAVE YOU USED THE INFORMATION THAT FAMILIES SHARED DURING THESE INTERVIEWS TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM?

FOR EXAMPLE

Do you feel the information you received was helpful in determining supports needed for students?

Was there anything missing that you now wished you'd asked about that would have helped support your students?

TOPIC 3 FOR INTERVIEWERS

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SUPPORTS, MATERIALS, OR RESOURCES YOU RECEIVED IN THIS PROCESS?

FOR EXAMPLE

Which letters, materials, recorded trainings, etc. from ODE were most helpful?

What additional supports / resources do you wish you had?

TOPIC 4 FOR INTERVIEWERS

IF THE FAMILY INTERVIEWS WERE OPTIONAL FOR YOUR SCHOOL / CLASSROOM, WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE?

