



Community Conversations: Early Learning Transition Check In



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In 2022, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Early Learning Division (ELD) tried a new way to connect families and schools to help children and families start kindergarten smoothly. ODE and ELD invited schools to hold “family interviews” between families and educators. Nine schools in Oregon tried out the family interviews to test out or “pilot” how the interviews might work. The interviews are one part of how ODE is trying out new ways to help families start kindergarten. ODE calls the pilot project the “Early Learning Transition and Family Interview Project.” ODE plans to continue this pilot project with more schools in coming years.

ODE and ELD want to learn how they can make these family interviews work best for families and schools. To do that, they worked with Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT). OKT hosted meetings with people who had been part of the ODE family interviews in 2022. We called these meetings “community conversations.” OKT asked them the following things about how to make the family interviews better:

- What people’s experiences in the 2022 family interviews were like
- What ideas people had for future family interviews
- How families and educators think the family interviews might work better in coming years

This report summarizes what OKT heard at the OKT meetings. What people said is grouped into similar ideas.

About Oregon’s Kitchen Table

OKT is part of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University. OKT works to give all people a voice in public decisions. We work to connect with people who usually aren’t included in these decisions. OKT helps people discuss state, local, and regional issues. OKT uses many ways and in many languages to learn what people think and experience.

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 done the family interviews or arranged them.

What OKT heard

Things people agreed about

Many people said similar things in the OKT meetings. Below we describe those ideas that people had in common:

- **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.

Things people disagreed about

Many people spoke of ideas that others did not share in common with them. Below we describe those ideas:

- **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 for more connection

Build on the community conversations

We recommend that ODE, ELD, and schools consider using future community conversations to connect families and educators at the start of kindergarten. The OKT community conversations were about improving family interviews. However, many people said that making connections was another benefit.

Help families teach 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.

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 the family interviews. Schools who have already tried out the family interviews could share what worked or didn’t work for them.

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 everyone to start school with a feeling of joy.

Quotes

“It (the family interview) 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.”

“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.”

“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 2 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.”

“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.”

“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.”)

“One thing that came out of the feedback session 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.”