



Community Engagement

Birth Through Five Literacy Plan

In 2023, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek and the Oregon Legislature started the Early Literacy Success Initiative to help children in Oregon learn language, early writing, and listening skills. The Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) is supporting people working in early childhood and families as they help very young children develop those skills. DELIC will create a plan with ways for partners, program staff, and community groups to support families to help children ages birth through five develop language, early writing, and listening skills. This plan is called the Birth Through Five Literacy Plan.

DELIC worked with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) to find out what people need to help children ages birth through five develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. What DELIC heard will shape the plan so that it is helpful for and supports families and children.

OKT used surveys and gatherings to hear from people all across Oregon. This summary tells what OKT heard.

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 tell us about.

HOW WE HEARD FROM PEOPLE

We used the following tools to find out what people think and feel about what people think and feel about supporting children develop language, early writing, and listening skills:

- Interviews
- Online and paper surveys in six languages
- Discussions with families
- Discussions with people who work for a community group or early childhood program

We used the following tools to tell people about the surveys and events:

- Social media
- Email and text messages
- Phone calls
- In-person outreach at events

WHAT WE ASKED PEOPLE ABOUT

First, we told people about how DELC will create a plan with ways for people working for early childhood programs and community groups to help families and children develop early literacy skills.

Next, we asked people about the following:

- What activities they do with their families and / or children to develop language, early writing, and listening skills;
- What early literacy activities they would like to see more of in their community;
- What people want to learn more about to help children develop language, early writing, and listening skills;
- What training people who work for a community group or early childhood program need;
- What barriers people think there are for activities and training;
- If they are part of an early learning program or community group, how they partner with other groups in their community; and
- What hopes they have for children ages birth through five in regards to early literacy.

The survey also asked people some information about themselves or the children in their family. The survey asked about people's roles, such as if they work in an early learning program or

have a child ages birth through five in their family. It also asked people as where they live, their age, their race, ethnicity or Tribe, and the language they prefer to use.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

We heard from around 400 people. We heard from people who live in or support families in 31 different counties. Many people who responded to the survey belong to a group that faces unequal access to educational opportunities.

They shared in the following ways:

- 255 people answered surveys;
- People attended two discussions for families. One was in-person in Spanish and 1 was on Zoom in English;
- People took part in around 20 individual or small group interviews; and
- People from early learning programs and community groups attended 10 discussions. 1 was in-person and 9 were on Zoom.

WHAT WE HEARD

Many people who work in early learning programs and community groups are already doing a lot in their communities. Many families are also doing a lot to help their children. Both community groups and families want more support.

What people agreed about

- Many people want to see more support for early literacy in families' first languages.
- It is important for people working with very young children and families to understand the early literacy milestones children should reach at different stages from birth to five.
- Many people also want to learn more about how to support children who are learning more than one language and how to be more culturally aware when engaging with families.
- There are several issues that make it harder for people to take part in early literacy training. These issues also make it harder for programs to connect with families about literacy.
- Some people want more options for how to use funding to meet the needs of their programs and communities. They also want clear guidelines and goals to help them decide what early literacy support to give families and children.

- People are also thinking about how to combine early literacy with other kinds of learning. They want to find fun and simple ways to teach literacy topics like hearing and working with sounds in words.
- Families and people working in early childhood programs also want simple, easy-to-use ways to support early literacy that can be part of their everyday routines.
- Groups want to work together to offer different early literacy activities. People often partner with public libraries in their community.

Different views or where people see the need to balance trade-offs

- Flexibility (like with funding) vs. clear, common guidelines (like choosing teaching materials)
- Learning by exploring, playing, and interacting vs. learning specific skills related to language, early writing, and listening through lessons
- Using learning tool (like books or technology) vs. using easy-to-find materials (like what families already have in their homes)

People didn't see these differences as being against each other. They want to find ways to do both. They want DELC to help them balance them.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

DELC will use what we heard from people to create the Birth Through Five Literacy Plan and give it to the state legislature. The state legislature will then make decisions about funding for early literacy.

Based on what we heard, DELC could think about how to involve community members as the state puts the Birth Through Five Literacy Plan into action. We suggest that DELC explain how the plan includes what people shared in recent meetings. Since early literacy support can look different in different parts of the state, DELC could talk to communities about how each region is supporting early literacy for young children. Also, because many people want more teamwork across the state, DELC and other groups could work together on a statewide campaign to support early literacy in families' daily lives.

Based on what we heard, ODE could do the following:

- Let people know how their input influenced the Birth Through Five Literacy Plan;
- Talk to communities to learn more about how each region is supporting early literacy and what different needs each region has;
- Help people find ways to use more play in teaching specific literacy skills; and,
- Work with people on a statewide campaign to support early literacy in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

It is inspiring to see how excited different groups and families are about helping children develop early literacy skills. People have used these OKT discussions to learn from each other, ask questions, and share ideas. As we move into 2025, Oregon will take the next steps in focusing on early literacy. We hope DELC and other leaders will continue to involve people as we move forward with the Early Literacy Success Initiative.