



The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) aim to give children a good start in kindergarten. In 2022, they tested meetings called the “Family Conversation” to meet this goal. Families and educators meet one-on-one to talk about how to help their kindergartner succeed.

In 2023, Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) held “Community Gatherings” to ask people how they felt about the Family Conversation they attended. This report shares what we did and what we 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

OKT held these gatherings to find out what people thought about the Family Conversations they attended:

- Twenty-four Community Gatherings. These were in-person meetings with families in different schools.
- Three Zoom discussions with school staff from different schools.
- Three interviews with individual families and educators

A few educators also emailed feedback. We talked to a total of 232 people.

## What We Heard

### What people agreed about

At the Community Gatherings, people shared many thoughts that others agreed with. Here is what we heard about the Family Conversations:

- **It was good to connect with others and learn together.**
  - It was good for families and educators to get to know each other early in the school year.
  - Families liked talking about who their children are, how they learn, and what they need in school.
  - Many families liked learning about the school, the teacher, and the classroom early in the school year.
  - Teachers and school staff liked learning about their students and their students' families.
  - Many educators and families want to meet more often about school topics.
  - Educators and families appreciate each other and how they care for students.
- **People need more communication and language help.**

- Families and educators want clear, complete, and prompt information about the Family Conversation.
- People said that all communications about the Family Conversation should be in many languages.
- Educators and families feel that other school staff can help with the Family Conversation. Staff should also speak the languages families prefer during this meeting.
- Some families want the Family Conversation to discuss cultural customs.
- **People want to understand the Family Conversation better.**
  - Many families want to know what the Family Conversation will cover. They want time to think about what they will say.
  - Families and educators wondered why Family Conversation asked about what children experienced before kindergarten.
  - Many people want to know how the state will use information from the Family Conversation.

### **What people disagreed about**

People had different views on a few things. These views include the following:

- Some families want more questions about academics. Other families want more questions about what their children are like and how they learn.
- People have different levels of trust in their schools and in state agencies like ODE and DELC. People with less trust also wary of the Family Conversation.

### **Ideas People Shared**

Here are some of the ideas that people had for ODE and DELC:

- Communicate early and clearly with educators and families about the Family Conversation.
- Tell people about the difference between Family Conversation and other school meetings.
- Help schools communicate with families.

- Think about if Oregon needs new policies to give schools time for the Family Conversation.
- Give schools examples of how to schedule Family Conversations.

Based on what people told us, we recommend schools think about these ideas, too:

- Have people from different jobs at the school welcome families to the Family Conversation.
- Have families of current students help new families at the Family Conversation. Bring people with similar cultures and languages.

Finally, we recommend that educators who have done the Family Conversation guide those who haven't. Working together will help make the Family Conversation a useful and lasting tool for families and educators.

## Conclusion

Hundreds of Oregon educators and families said they support the Family Conversations. They value learning about the student, the school, and each other. The greatest wish was for early and simple communication in many languages. Now more families and educators know about the Family Conversation. These Oregonians can be part of helping other people become familiar with the Family Conversation.