

Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan

Community Engagement

SUMMARY

In 2024, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1532. It directs the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to develop and carry out a statewide education plan. This plan is to improve the learning and experiences of students who are refugees, asylum seekers, or other immigrants.

ODE partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT). This was to hear from immigrant and refugee communities across the state about what they would like to see in the plan. Over 450 people took part in this. People shared in six languages.

This Summary shares about the process as well as key findings.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

To carry out SB 1532, ODE sought to hear from many groups. They include youth and families that are immigrants and refugees. They also include organizations that serve those youth and families. OKT used these methods to reach people and hear their thoughts, experiences and views:

- One on one interviews with 13 people.
- Nine events and conversations led by partners to gather input from families in their communities.
- A series of three Zoom conversations with community organizations and groups that serve immigrant and refugee families.

FINDINGS

Key observations:

- Schools are education centers. They are places where communities come together. They offer resources too. As such, schools play a crucial role to support families as a whole. Schools connect them with support and help them thrive in many ways.
- Immigrant and refugee communities in our state are made up of people and families with a vast range of experiences, ideas, and beliefs.

- Students and families want to see people who look like them and speak their language at school. A number of people suggest that schools could view this as an opportunity to bring in parents as volunteers and hire people from immigrant and refugee families as school staff.
- These efforts took place during the 2024 national election when immigration was a central issue. Many people feel nervous that immigrant and refugee families and students won't get the support they need. Some people also worry that the groups who serve immigrant and refugee communities will have a harder time helping families. At the same time, people said they hope that the state will create and carry out ways to help immigrant and refugee students in Oregon schools.

How people and communities think about student success:

- There is a wide range of views about what “student success” means. They include these outcomes:
 - Academics, such as good grades.
 - Community, such as leading to better opportunities for the next generation.
 - Social, such as strong connections and relationships with peers.
 - Emotional, such as students feeling safe and confident.
- Many want students to have success in being a part of the U.S. culture. At the same time there is concern about them keeping their cultural identity.
- Many people feel it is crucial that teachers teach in a way that uses students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives.
- Chances for social connection are key for student success in many ways. One broad approach that people often raised is to include these students and families in school activities in ways that:
 - Acknowledge their home cultures.
 - Create ways for them to participate.
 - Take into account families' barriers and needs. For instance, plan school activities at times and on days when working families can attend.

Reflections on welcoming school environments:

- It is important to create ways to involve parents and families in their students' education. People want to see:
 - Strategies to ensure appropriate translation and interpretation services.

- Support for families to learn how the school system works.
- Ways for families and students themselves to help plan and participate in school events and activities.
- People appreciate when school staff understand students' experiences. They want to see staff have more awareness and understanding. They also want staff to have more understanding about how education is different in other cultures. This includes the role that parents expect to play in their children's education and what schools expect from parents.
- Food is a key factor in many ways. This includes finding ways to meet food needs that students from immigrant and refugee communities have. Food can also provide a way for schools to involve families and students in activities and events. And food can help families and students connect and build relationships within the school community.
- It is important to have school staff who have similar lived experiences as immigrant and refugee families in their communities. This is key to be able to:
 - Create a welcoming school environment.
 - Help families understand and navigate the school system.
- Many people want to see increased support when students transition into or out of school. They also want to see more support when students move into a new grade. Many people talked about support in these transitions:
 - Starting kindergarten.
 - Entering high school.
 - Moving to other studies or training after high school.
 - Moving to a new school.
- Many want to make sure that schools are prepared to support students new to the U.S. when they enter the school system for the first time. This is especially a need for students who are coming from difficult environments.

FUTURE EFFORTS

The people who took part in this process are eager to talk more about this topic. We suggest that ODE share updates and outcomes with the people that took part in this process.

In the future, ODE could seek ways to engage more people and a wider range of immigrant and refugee communities that live in Oregon. ODE could also focus future

efforts on certain areas of the state. This could include communities in Eastern Oregon as well as regions with lower populations.

Many of the suggestions shared are actions that ODE cannot carry out. So we urge ODE to share these insights with school districts. These suggestions also provide a chance for schools and districts themselves to engage and partner with immigrant and refugee families in their communities.