

September 2024

Community Engagement: The Early Learning Transition Check-In

Listening Sessions with Early Learning Partners, Community-Based Organizations, and Culturally Specific Organizations



TABLE OF CONTENTS

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*2**

 Participation 3

 Findings: Commonly Held Values and Beliefs about the Family Conversation..... 3

 Findings: Commonly Held Broader Values and Beliefs 3

 Findings: Areas of Differences or Tension..... 4

 Recommendations: The Family Conversation 5

 Recommendations: Strengthening Relationships..... 5

 Recommendations: Where Early Learning and K-12 Systems Meet..... 5

 Conclusion..... 6

 About Oregon's Kitchen Table 6

***SECTION 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND DESIGN*.....7**

 Engagement Goals 7

 Outreach and Engagement Activities..... 8

 Participation 9

***SECTION 2: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS and CROSS-CUTTING THEMES*..... 10**

***SECTION 3: INPUT ON THE FAMILY CONVERSATION AND THE ELTC*..... 13**

***SECTION 4: BROADER INPUT RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD AND K-12 EDUCATION* 20**

***SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS*..... 31**

***SECTION 6: CONCLUSION*..... 34**

***APPENIDX A: LISTENING SESSIONS MATERIALS*.....A-1**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spring 2024, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) partnered with Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) to conduct a community engagement process to hear from early learning partners, community groups, and culturally specific organizations about how the newly redesigned “Early Learning Transition Check-In” (ELTC) could help Oregon educators support families with young children as they transition into kindergarten. OKT designed and hosted listening sessions with a variety of early learning partners, culturally specific organizations, and other community-based organizations with the following goals: 1) to hear how the first component of the ELTC, the Family Conversation, might be most helpful for partners in their work; 2) to hear about people’s experiences in supporting families to navigate early learning and kindergarten transitions; 3) to better understand how early learning partners, community-based organizations, and culturally specific partners approach family engagement; and 4) to identify opportunities for early learning partners, community groups, culturally specific organizations, and ODE and DELIC to work together regionally or on a statewide level to better understand what is happening with early learning around the state.

This report provides an overview of the engagement process as well as high level findings. The focus of this community engagement process was on the Family Conversation and the Early Learning Transition Check-In; however, both the engagement process and the report are intended to recognize and honor input on broader issues beyond the Family Conversation and ELTC related to multiple systems and where systems – in particular early learning and care and K-12 educational systems - meet.

The report contains seven sections in addition to this Executive Summary:

- Summary of community engagement process
- General observations about cross-cutting themes
- Input on the Family Conversation and ELTC
- Broader Input Related to Early Childhood And K-12 Education
- Recommendations
- Brief conclusion
- Appendices including materials used in the listening sessions.

Participation

OKT heard from 114 people from approximately 60 organizations through in-person and Zoom listening sessions, as well as through individual and small group interviews. Of these organizations, 28 serve culturally specific communities, 6 are Early Learning Hubs, 4 are Head Start programs, 2 are Tribal programs, and the remainder are a mix of other types of entities (early learning programs and providers, Educational Service Districts, public agencies, and other community-based organizations).

Findings: Commonly Held Values and Beliefs about the Family Conversation

Across the listening sessions and individual interviews, the following commonly held values and beliefs emerged regarding the Family Conversation specifically, the transition to kindergarten, and broader, cross-system issues:

- In general, people want to see **additional types of support to help their families with the kindergarten transition and to create a warm welcome to schools through the Family Conversation**. Early Learning partners, community-based organizations, and culturally specific organizations can help with some – but not all – of these supports.
- **Establishing a sense of safety and trust first** prior to the Family Conversation is critical to begin to build relationships between families and educators.
- Opportunities for families and children to **see themselves – their languages, cultures, and values – reflected in the classroom** and school from the very beginning is an important component of creating a warm welcome to kindergarten.

Findings: Commonly Held Broader Values and Beliefs

We also heard the following commonly held values and beliefs about early learning and K-12 education more broadly, beyond the Family Conversation alone:

- Many participants in the listening sessions value opportunities for families to **connect and build relationships** with their children's schools and teachers.
- Many people desire **more consistent and deeper connections and relationships among the different entities** involved in supporting families with young children.

- Overall, the **need for more early learning opportunities and programs** – particularly low or no cost as well as culturally and linguistically specific programs – is top of mind for many participants.
- **Relationships are core to both learning about families’ and students’ experiences and to the experiences themselves.**
- People would like to have **more, ongoing opportunities** to learn from each other across organizations, regions, and systems.
- There is a **need for ways to share information** across organizations, with schools, and with agencies.

Findings: Areas of Differences or Tension

There are a couple of areas where people held different values and beliefs or where people noted that there are tradeoffs to be considered. Regarding the Family Conversation, we noticed the following differences or tensions:

- There is a **tension inherent in the combined goals of the ELTC and the Family Conversation** in trying to collect data or information while also relationship building and creating warm transitions. Depending on which goal a partner organization is focusing on or supporting, it may create conflicting advice from partners about what approaches or actions ODE and DELC might consider.
- We also heard **differing perspectives on** whether the Family Conversation questions could provide **enough specific information** to be helpful for people and their programs.

Additional areas of differences or tension more broadly related to early learning and K-12 education include:

- People have differing opinions about the value – as well as the feasibility - of **home visits** as a way to develop relationships, welcome families to kindergarten, and learn about what families need.
- While many people expressed a desire for more collaboration, **people and programs feel stretched already** and worry about the burden falling too heavily towards one sector.

- We heard **differences in what would be helpful for people to learn** about in order to best support the families they serve.
- There is also **disagreement about what information formats**– particularly between quantitative versus qualitative information - would be most helpful.

Recommendations: The Family Conversation

We recommend that the staff from both agencies pay particular attention to the following recommendations, based on what we heard, regarding the Family Conversation,

- **Include families themselves** in community engagement around any potential additional components of the ELTC.
- Create and offer **basic information in multiple languages about schools in Oregon and kindergarten in particular** as part of the Family Conversation
- Consider **focusing future engagement on particular topics** of interest related to the transition into kindergarten;

Recommendations: Strengthening Relationships

Based on what participants shared around the importance of relationships, we also offer the following recommendations that schools, districts, early learning partners, and culturally specific organizations consider to strengthen relationships:

- **Consider a “whole community” approach** to how schools implement the Family Conversation to include trusted, known people from early learning programs, culturally specific organizations, and amongst informal community connectors to help provide a warm hand-off.
- **Co-Create a community outreach and communication plan** with local early learning programs and culturally specific organizations for the kindergarten transition and beyond.

Recommendations: Where Early Learning and K-12 Systems Meet

And, finally, regarding early learning and K-12 education systems more broadly, ODE and DELC might consider the following:

- **Expand the kinds of organizations, programs, and people – such as libraries or county programs aimed at supporting families with young children** - that ODE and DELC engage with on early learning efforts to include a variety of entities supporting families with young children;
- Explore how **DELC and ODE might convene opportunities for more peer-to-peer learning and support** to happen; and
- Explore how **ODE and DELC can support connections and information sharing** across systems and organizations.

Conclusion

As OKT concludes this third engagement process with ODE and DELC on supporting families and students' transition to kindergarten, we were struck by people's commitment to walking alongside families and children as they begin schooling in Oregon. Doing so will take convening people to learn from each other and test out new approaches. It will also take intentional efforts to build and nurture relationships. We encourage ODE and DELC to consider ways to invite more families to participate in envisioning the warm welcome they want to see for children in Oregon as they start their K-12 school journey.

About Oregon's Kitchen Table

Oregon's Kitchen Table is a statewide community engagement program that invites all Oregonians to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. We particularly focus on reaching, engaging, and hearing from Oregonians that have been left out of traditional engagement processes. Using culturally specific and targeted outreach, as well as community partnerships, we work with organizers, translators, and interpreters to assure that materials and online and in-person engagement activities are available for and relevant to all Oregonians. We honor and value the wide range of values, ideas, and lived experiences that community members share with us and with public decision-makers. OKT is housed in the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University.

SECTION 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND DESIGN

Background

Beginning in 2013, The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment was given each fall to entering kindergartners to assess three core areas of learning and development: early literacy, early math, and interpersonal/self-regulation skills. In 2020 and 2021, the State Board of Education suspended the Kindergarten Assessment because of the complicated nature of implementation in the midst of the pandemic. Since then, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) 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. This effort is called the “Early Learning Transition Check-In: A Collaborative Engagement with Community” (ELTC).

Engagement Goals

In spring 2024, OKT partnered with ODE and DELIC to conduct a series of listening sessions and interviews with groups and organizations that support early learning and families with young children. The goal of these listening sessions was multi-fold: 1. to understand how elements of the Early Learning Transition Check-In could be helpful for those partners and organizations; 2. to learn what partners and organizations are already doing to understand what families need as their children transition into kindergarten; 3. to learn more about community early learning family engagement practices and how they could apply in K-12 settings; and 4. to hear what could be helpful for partners and organizations in working together across organizations, levels, and systems to support families with young children.

The focus of this community engagement process was to hear from early learning partners and culturally specific organizations about the Family Conversation and other potential ELTC components; however, because the ELTC involves a transition point from one system (early learning and care) to another (K-12 education), we recognize that there are many different issues that intersect with the moment that a child starts kindergarten. We created space in our conversations and interviews for people to talk more broadly about other aspects or issues related to where these two systems meet. Some of these intersect with input participants provided about the Family Conversation specifically. Other topics relate to much

broader experiences, beliefs, and ideas that early learning partners and culturally specific organizations have around supporting families and young children across different interactions and systems. This report focuses on the feedback related to the Family Conversation and also highlights input that has broader implications for other areas of work outside the ELTC and the Family Conversation.

Outreach and Engagement Activities

At the onset of the project, OKT worked with ODE and DELC to early learning and culturally specific partner organizations - including DELC's Early Childhood Equity Fund grantees and Early Learning Hubs - to participate in listening sessions and interviews between February and April 2024. Initially, we organized both in-person geographically focused listening sessions and Zoom listening sessions in both English and Spanish open to any of partners and organizations in any geographic region. This was intended to hear about geographic-specific preferences, to give people in different regions an opportunity to gather in-person over a shared meal, and to offer more flexible options.

Once these geographic and Zoom listening sessions were underway, we noticed a strong preference for meeting via Zoom rather than in-person. We also noticed that participants representing those organizations - who held a variety of positions within their organizations - had different experiences and understanding about the families their organizations served. While some of those representatives shared similar lived experiences to the families they support, many did not.

In order to ensure that we were hearing from people who could speak directly to the cultural, linguistic, and lived experience of the families they support, we adopted an approach that Oregon's Kitchen Table often uses in community engagement processes, focusing on "community connectors." Community connectors are people who are respected and trusted both inside and outside of their own communities. They have relationships within their own communities and are interested in and knowledgeable about where policies intersect or conflict with people's on-the-ground experiences. While they have their own perspectives on issues, they are aware of and understand the perspectives that other people in their community might hold. Sometimes they hold formal positions in culturally specific organizations or programs; sometimes they hold more informal positions in their communities.

We identified community connectors from previous OKT projects as well as through ODE and DELC partners. We adjusted the design to include individual interviews, small group interviews, and more virtual conversations held in English, Spanish, and Russian. In addition, we worked with OKT community organizers from the Chuukese community, the Slavic community, partners in the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services Refugee Resettlement Program, and ODE's Migrant Education Program to bring together small groups for listening sessions or interviews. These adjustments provided opportunities to hear from many more people who themselves came from particular communities and understood the experiences of other families with young children.

In total, Oregon's Kitchen Table conducted the following engagement activities from February to July 2024:

- 4 in-person community gatherings in Klamath Falls, Pendleton, Portland, and Redmond.
- 8 virtual community conversations over Zoom (5 in English, 2 in Spanish, and 1 in Russian)
- 11 interviews with individuals or small groups

Participation

A total of 114 people participated in either a listening session or an interview. Participants were located across the state and included people working in rural areas, small cities, and large metropolitan areas. People came from the following types of organizations:

- 28 culturally specific organizations
- 6 Early Learning Hubs
- 4 Head Start programs
- 2 Tribal programs
- 36 other types of organizations (e.g. a public agency, an early learning program, Educational Service District)

Some participants received a \$50 stipend. Not all participants were eligible due to employment status as public employees.

SECTION 2: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS and CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

In addition to input related to the specific engagement goals, a few topics came up repeatedly from many participants. These are discussed in more detail in later sections; however, given how prevalent they were in our discussions, we raise them here to highlight their prevalence. These topics came up when participants talked about the Family Conversation specifically and when they talked about other issues related to where early childhood and K-12 education meet.

Relationships

Across the different discussions, we noticed that many participants highly value relationships in multiple ways. As one interviewee said, “At the core of everything is relationship, genuine authenticity, and exchange between one person and another.” While each of the sections below describe how people talked about the importance of relationships and how they approach or would like to see other entities approach building relationships, it is notable how frequently relationships came up from many different participants and in many contexts. Relatedly, when people talked about relationships, they often referred to building trust, as well as creating opportunities for listening, and sharing.

The focus on the necessity of building relationships and what is needed to do so raises a tension in the multiple goals of the ELTC. Specifically, we noticed a tension between the goal of collecting “a statewide snapshot of data about children and families as they begin kindergarten” and the goal of supporting “families in building relationships with their kindergarten educators.”¹ For some people, a component like the Family Conversation could provide some helpful information to focus early learning efforts. We noticed that people from Early Learning Hubs or people who hold leadership positions in community and culturally specific organizations were more likely to focus on that particular goal. But, for many participants - particularly participants who provide direct support to families through their early learning program or culturally specific organization - developing and nurturing relationships with families and children over time is the priority and not data collection.

¹See “Project Purpose” and “Project Goals” on DELC website - <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/families/pages/early-learning-transition.aspx>

Need for More Early Learning Programs and Opportunities

One other topic that came up in almost every discussion and interview was the need for more early learning programs and opportunities in Oregon, particularly at low or no cost, as well as culturally and linguistically specific programs. This was true no matter where or with whom the conversations took place. One person who supports Mam and Spanish speaking families in a rural community shared, “We need more centers that support agricultural families, while they work, their children are in a safe place. . . Other families that I have talked to, they are from Guatemala and they speak Mam, for which a lot of resources are not available. Their first language is neither English nor Spanish, so they are not prepared for kindergarten based on what is provided to them in a language that is not their own.”

Original quote in Spanish: “Necesitamos mas centros que apoyen familias agricolas, mientras ellos trabajen esten un lugar seguro. Para nosotros en nuestra comunidad es dificil - quiero ser la voz para estas familias para que hagamos un cambio. Otras de las familias que he platicado, los niños platican Mam, su primer idioma no es ni ingles ni español, entonces no estan preparados para el kinder.” *Translation:* “We need more centers that support agricultural families, while they work, their children are in a safe place. For us in our community it is difficult - I want to be the voice for these families so that we make a change. Other families that I have talked to, they are from Guatemala and they speak Mam, for which a lot of resources are not available. Their first language is neither English nor Spanish, so they are not prepared for kindergarten based on what is provided to them in a language that is not their own.”

Overall, participants pointed to a number of factors that hinder their communities in being able to offer more early learning programs in general and linguistically or culturally specific programs in particular. These include funding, staff capacity, staff retention, and staff recruitment. Several people who support immigrant and refugee communities noted that there is a general lack of linguistic support for languages that are less frequently spoken.

Systemic Gaps

Participants often referred to gaps related to early learning and the kindergarten transition in particular. A few people identified knowledge or information gaps, such as being able to provide resources or connections to families. Other people spoke of wanting to be able to better reach or engage families that are not already somehow connected to any kind of

system (e.g. healthcare, early learning, or other) prior to k-12 schools. One person noted that they are aware of young children in their communities who have a family member who is incarcerated and move frequently, making connections to systems challenging. In addition, one of the main gaps we heard about from people was the gap between early learning programs and culturally specific organizations and the k-12 school system. We heard a desire to try to bridge that gap but also uncertainty about who is responsible for helping to do so and what might be the most effective, lasting ways to close the gap. We heard from a few culturally specific organizations that, even though they have formal partnerships with and are sometimes located inside of a school, there are still communication challenges and a lack of cohesion with the school system.

Areas of Input Consistent across Multiple Community Engagement Processes

Finally, this engagement process with early learning partners and culturally specific organizations marks the third engagement process that OKT has partnered with ODE and DELC on around the Family Conversation and the ELTC. The previous engagement processes focused on hearing from the families and educators whose schools participated in the Family Conversation pilot in 2022 and 2023. We have noticed the following themes come up consistently during all three processes:

- Focusing on relationships and making personal connections is a priority.
- Meeting different cultural and linguistic needs in preparation for and during the Family Conversation is important. This also includes concerns about the general lack of opportunities or resources for families with young children, particularly ones that are culturally and linguistically specific.
- Communities' and families' experiences (sometimes across generations) greatly impact how much they trust schools as well as how they approach sending their children to kindergarten.
- Families rely on a variety of different relationships with people across their communities as they navigate the transition to kindergarten. There is an opportunity to work cross-organizationally more to create a warm welcome to kindergarten.
- Families, educators, early learning partners, and culturally specific organizations want to be able to better support families with kindergartners who experience disabilities as they start their K-12 educational experiences. This includes understanding how to

navigate both the early learning system and the K-12 system in general as well as through the beginning weeks of kindergarten.

SECTION 3: INPUT ON THE FAMILY CONVERSATION AND THE ELTC

During the listening sessions, we shared information about the Family Conversation, first component of the Early Learning Transition Check-in. This prompted discussions on how people think the Family Conversation could be helpful for families, schools, and partners as well as ideas for adjustments to the Family Conversation. Several people shared that their program conducts a similar kind of conversation, either with a family coach or liaison or with a teacher in an early learning program. Overall, we heard appreciation for the Family Conversation, particularly as a way to help nurture relationships and learn about what might best support children in the kindergarten setting. Several people noted how they've observed families appreciate opportunities to have a voice. One person said, "When we include parents, they understand their importance as parents, and we can see that they have a vision for their children beyond kindergarten."

"When we include parents, they understand their importance as parents, and we can see that they have a vision for their children beyond kindergarten."

Perspectives on the Family Conversation and Relationship Building

In terms of the Family Conversation as a way to help build relationships and make connections between families, educators, and schools, we heard a note of caution about the Family Conversation as the first component of the Early Learning Transition Check-In. Many people who work in culturally specific organizations – and who are themselves members of those communities – described the need to establish a sense of safety and trust in some way *prior* to the Family Conversation to create an environment where families can feel like they could openly share information about their and their child's experiences. One person pointed out that a phone conversation to schedule the Family Conversation was an important step in

the process of welcoming families, as that call can set first impressions as well as a tone for future interactions between families and schools. Another person suggested coordinating the timing of the Family Conversation with a cultural event or evening for families from a particular cultural group, as this could feel more inviting. They said, “You can have a parent night but if it’s a specific cultural parent night, that will bring people in who wouldn’t normally come in.”

“Sometimes districts have a hard time admitting that harm is done in schools as far as racism. A lot of [our] families struggle seeing their child go into school because they’ve heard stories from other families. They have a hard time coming to terms with what their school culture is towards us.”

Several people from culturally specific organizations emphasized how important it is to understand the impacts schools have had on communities of color, especially Native and Indigenous families whose communities have a particularly harmful history with schools. We heard that this understanding is especially relevant to the Family Conversation as an entry point or first interaction for the family with their child’s

teacher and school. Similarly, one person who supports families who are migrant workers said, “Sometimes districts have a hard time admitting that harm is done in schools as far as racism. A lot of [our] families struggle seeing their child go into school because they’ve heard stories from other families. They have a hard time coming to terms with what their school culture is towards us.”

We also heard from people who are part of immigrant communities that there is a hesitation to send their children to school in Oregon due to concerns about whether their children would be cared for and loved. One person shared that this reluctance is often misattributed in the broader community to those families not valuing school or education.

Family Conversation Questions

Original quote in Spanish: “En mi caso cuando recibimos niños nuevos en el precolar y una de las preguntas es ‘como consuelan a su hijo, o como confortan a su hijo? Como aprende su hijo?’” Translation: “In my case, when we enroll new children in preschool, one of the questions we ask is ‘How do you console your child, or how do you comfort your child?’ and ‘How does your child learn?’”

We heard a wide range of suggestions regarding the questions posed in the Family Conversation. Many people who work for an early learning program noted that they also conduct similar kinds of conversations with families to learn about the children in their

programs. Several people offered examples of other kinds of questions they include in these initial meetings. One person shared, “In my case, when we enroll new children in preschool, one of the questions we ask is ‘How do you console your child, or how do you comfort your child?’ and ‘How does your child learn?’” Other people echoed the importance of asking a question around how the child learns.

We heard some differing perspectives on whether families that people work with might find the questions too intrusive or too superficial. A few people also said that they thought the questions wouldn’t gather detailed enough responses to be helpful in providing information they need in their early childhood work. One person wondered if the responses to the Family Conversation questions – particularly the ones regarding services or programs people wished they could access – might be more helpful to pose to families at the end of kindergarten or in first grade. By then, families may have a sense of what could have been helpful whereas at the *start* of kindergarten, they may not even know what the possibilities could be or what could help prepare their child for kindergarten until after they have experienced kindergarten.

We also heard the following suggestions for questions areas:

- What children are already learning about or taking part in at home or in their community;
- Invitations to families to share about their culture (such as the holidays the family celebrates);
- Specific questions about family concerns for their child as they start kindergarten (one person said gathering information about concerns would be helpful on a regional level to understand family needs); and
- More guided questions about childcare and early learning experiences to better understand why people may or may not be accessing particular programs.

While not related to the questions per se, a number of people also wondered about what kinds of information the schools and educators were relaying to parents in the Family Conversation. As one person said, “Typically, they [families] have more questions, want more information, and want to know how to stay connected with the school and continue supporting their child.”

Original quote in Spanish: "Cuando nosotros incluimos los padres entienden la importancia que tienen como padres, y podemos ver que tienen una visión para sus hijos - más allá del kinder. Típicamente tienen más preguntas, quieren más información, como puedo seguir conectado con la escuela, como puedo seguir apoyando a su niño." Translation: "What are the teachers sharing in the Family Conversations? Are the teachers also sharing their hopes and dreams for their classrooms? Are they sharing ideas about how they can involve families? That's how the capacity is built - volunteering in the classroom, then families move on to different levels of involvement."

Several people who support immigrants and refugee families said that their families often want to know basic information about the school and the classroom. Another person asked, "What are the teachers sharing in the Family Conversations? Are the teachers also sharing their hopes and dreams for their classrooms? Are they sharing ideas about how they can involve families? That's how the capacity is built - volunteering in the classroom, then families move on to different levels of involvement."

Family Conversation Settings

In conversations where people expressed hesitation about their families' comfort levels with schools, as well as challenges to being able to attend an in-person Family Conversation at their child's school, we asked what might be a more accessible place for a welcome or conversation with the teacher. As mentioned earlier, some people suggested home visits while recognizing privacy tradeoffs as well as limits on teachers' time and capacity. Other people suggested a "third space" where families already gather or are recognized as communal gathering places. This may be at a community or culturally specific organization's gathering place where other activities are held. One person suggested, "Is there a space that everyone already knows about that the teachers could go to? Low-income housing sites, apartment complexes? It needs to not have a clinical, caseworker feel to it." Using a "third space" as the setting for a Family Conversation would require intentional relationship building between the school and that space or organization.

On the other hand, many people saw great value in the opportunity for a family to visit their child's classroom, particularly with the child present to see their desk, chair, or cubby. They thought this would help promote a sense of safety and trust for the child.

Necessary Supports

When holding the Family Conversation at the school, people noted particular supports that would help families in attending and feeling comfortable. One person shared an example of one school district they worked with who provided transportation for supporting families in attending a family night at their school, with “bus stops” set up in different places of their city to shuttle families to the school itself.

Several people suggested an understanding of trauma-informed approach could be helpful for educators as part of the ELTC. As mentioned earlier, we heard this particularly from people who support Native and Indigenous families as well as other communities of color with historical trauma with schools and the educational system in particular. We also heard this from people who support refugees and families who are coming from areas with high conflict.

In regards to a trauma-informed approach, participants emphasized the need to build trust and form relationships before the Family Conversation takes place. We also heard from some community-based organizations a desire to serve as a “bridge” between schools and families by accompanying families to the Family Interview and taking part in a “warm handoff”, in which a family advocate introduces the family to the teacher facilitating a smooth transition. A couple of people noted that they think trainings in cultural or linguistic competency could be helpful for all staff in school, especially if staff are involved as “greeters” in some way. One person said, “Sometimes support staff get left out, like the school secretary or receptionist isn’t getting trained in cultural competencies / cultural awareness. . . This is usually the first face that people see. It’s important.”

“Sometimes support staff get left out, like the school secretary or receptionist isn’t getting trained in cultural competencies / cultural awareness. . . This is usually the first face that people see.”

Other people emphasized the importance of the “greeting” at the door of the school and an understanding that families may be bringing complex emotions to the Family Conversation, based on the adults’ own histories and associations they bring with them around schools. One person said, “Understanding that generally speaking Black, Brown, Indigenous families and parents didn’t have a positive experience with the system - do those on the other end understand what possibly could be coming in your first interaction? Awareness of that is key. . . if you are aware, you want to do different, you’ll see and acknowledge every parent that

walks through the door.” A couple of people mentioned that they thought it would be helpful to have other school staff be active participants as “greeters” when families arrive for their Family Conversation, including front desk staff or the principal who are often the school “greeters.” Another person said that they thought having staff who serve in additional resource capacities - such as the school counselor or nurse - participate in some aspect of the Family Conversation so that if families express a need, they can immediately connect to the appropriate person without having to set up another meeting.

We also heard a high level of concern about available linguistic support for families who are not comfortable in English. We heard this concern across all language groups and in different parts of the state but in particular for families who speak a language for which there are fewer resources in the state or the community. One person shared, “I have stories in which parents, during home visits, express a lot of gratitude for being able to speak their language. It

“I have stories in which parents, during home visits, express a lot of gratitude for being able to speak their language. It helps to try and visualize beyond what they need.”

helps to try and visualize beyond what they need.”

While people wanted to ensure that their families would receive linguistic and cultural support at the Family Conversation and in schools in general, several people also expressed concern that teachers and other school staff themselves are not receiving the support they need to be able to

navigate linguistic and cultural differences. One person said, “While we hear a lot that home language is important - and it’s in the Early Literacy framework - they [educators] know home language is important and valid, but they don’t know what to do if there’s no one there to support them.”

Additional Components for Consideration beyond the Family Conversation

Several people, especially people who are part of a culturally specific organization, shared that they want to ensure a “warm handoff” for families from a trusted person or organization they have a relationship with to the school and kindergarten teacher. And many participants are eager to help make that warm handoff happen; however, in many communities there are either no opportunities to participate in some kind of “warm handoff” or consistent relationships and connections are lacking between early learning programs or culturally specific organizations and the K-12 school system.

One of the common suggestions we heard about what to add to the ELTC was some type of pre-Family Conversation activity. Several people suggested some kind of simple communication mailed to the student directly from the teacher to demonstrate the teacher's interest in and care for the child. We also heard support for more playful, fun activities that could help build relationships among families as well. These suggestions include:

- A tour of the school that also serves to provide basic information about how the education system works and the logistics (schedule, food, etc.) of a particular school
- A kind of scavenger hunt or “station” activity for families to learn about different parts or places in a school as well as other staff
- An organized “playdate” with families on the school playground

“A lot of people want to know the practical pieces of what will happen. Like how specifically will the day to day look like for my child? What can I expect for my child?”

Practical and Logistical Information

During discussions when we asked about what would help support families in the transition to kindergarten, people shared that families often ask them questions around the more practical or logistical topics. As one person said, “A lot of people want to know the practical pieces of what will happen. Like how specifically will the day to day look like for my child? What can I expect for my child? What can I tell them the day will look and how it could look different from some of their classmates?” When people raised these topics, they often said they thought an exchange or meeting with families that covers them ought to happen prior to a Family Conversation. These topics include:

- Clear communication channels: Who, how, and when do I communicate with at my child's school when I have a question or there is a problem? What if no one answers me or if I'm not satisfied with the answer – who do I go to next?
- Materials: What do I need to send my child with? What should they bring with them?
- Schedule: What does the school day look like? What happens at each part of the day?
- Food: What food should I prepare for my child and when / how will they eat it?
- Toileting: What are the expectations around using the bathroom? What will happen if my child has an accident?

General information about how school systems in Oregon work

Additionally, people working with families from immigrant and refugee communities noted that many of their families have not yet learned how the Oregon education system and their child's school in particular operates. One person recounted that one family with a student with a disability were surprised to learn that their child could attend school because in their home country, their child would not have been able to. For many families, the possibilities and expectations around their children's education look very different than in their home country and culture. People would like to see some preliminary step that seeks to ensure families understand these expectations and how school works much earlier.

SECTION 4: BROADER INPUT RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD AND K-12 EDUCATION

As mentioned previously, while the focus of this community engagement process was the Family Conversation and other potential ELTC components; we recognize that there are many different issues that intersect with the moment that a child starts kindergarten. We created space in our conversations and interviews for people to talk more broadly about other aspects or issues related to where early learning and care and K-12 education systems meet. Some of the experiences, perspectives, and ideas participants shared relate to a range of topics and issues beyond the Family Conversation and beyond the transition to kindergarten. While this input is much broader and may be beyond the scope of the ELTC, these are important topics for the people – and for the families they serve- who participated in this process.

Approaches to Family Engagement

“Our families want to feel heard.”

Across the many different forms of engagement, people expressed strong support for opportunities that help families connect to and build relationships with the teachers and staff in their children's schools. Several times we heard people emphasize that the families they support through their organizations and programs value opportunities to be heard, valued, and respected, particularly when it comes to their hopes for and concerns about their children.

One person who supports immigrant and refugee families said, “Our families want to feel heard. In that very first meeting, it can be a lot. Making sure they’re heard from the very first meeting and feel like they’re being taken seriously. It’s also very important for them to feel like the teacher is interacting with the child and trying to build a relationship with their child. They want to see that their child will be part of the school, taken care of, and not singled out.”

Many of the people we talked with consider their work as supporting the whole family and view any early childhood learning, including the kindergarten transition, as connected to the family as a whole and many aspects of a family’s life.

Connecting to and Relationship Building with Families

Many people noted that focusing on relationship building was core in their own work with families in early learning settings as well as other types of programming. Several people emphasized that building relationships is critical before even getting to the “work” their program does to support families, including gathering information about families to understand their needs and what could help support them. When we asked how people learn about their families or what their families need, several people shared that they either prioritize or focus on relationships rather than gathering information or data or that they do not gather information about their families without building a relationship first.

One approach that came up frequently in conversations was a home-visit approach as a way to develop relationships, welcome families to educational systems, and learn about what families need. Many early learning providers and culturally specific organizations shared that they conduct home visits in their programs. They often find home visits to be a positive approach, because they take the burden off of families to come to a different location, they are often where families feel most comfortable, and they help provide a sense of what home dynamics are like. At the same time, people also shared that there are families who find home visits to be intrusive or too overwhelming to have a stranger in their home. People also shared a perception that such an approach might not be feasible for K-12 educators in many communities, given time and capacity constraints they might have.

We heard from participants’ experiences that the following aspects are important to consider in order to – as one person put it – “invest in relationships with families”:

- Allowing for how long it takes for a relationship to develop, including creating multiple opportunities or touch-points to be together;

- Lifting as much of the burden as possible from families, such as mode of communication, time of day, or transportation;
- Consistency, especially given that resources are often time-limited or shift with changes in leadership or staff in different funding entities;
- Hospitality, including different cultural expectations around what gatherings or meetings entail;
- Making the effort to understand cultural differences, particularly as there are very different cultural expectations around education and children; and
- Bridging linguistic needs, particularly for families who speak languages other than English and Spanish. Family coaches who support refugee communities noted that there are few resources to support the languages spoken by more recent arrivals from Afghanistan and countries throughout Africa.

Creating Opportunities for Representation

Many people also said that opportunities for families and children to see themselves – their languages, cultures, and values – reflected in the classroom and school from the very beginning is a key component of supporting families to connect and feel a sense of safety and trust. One of the main ways people thought that could happen was for staff in schools who reflect their families in race, ethnicity, culture, or language spoken. One person who supports Black families said, “I have to be able to see images of me in the classroom. Those pieces need to be in there to counter what is happening everywhere else.”

People also shared the following ideas for how schools and teachers could reflect families in the building by having:

- Information in families’ home languages
- Books and materials in family’s home languages
- Books and materials that reflect different types of experiences students might connect with
- Inviting families to bring an object – a flag, a toy, a picture – from their culture to the Family Conversation

How Participants Learn about the Families and Children They Support

There is a wide variety of ways that organizations learn about their families and understand what is happening with the early learning landscape in their community. Some organizations and programs employ more formal approaches to gathering information while others rely on more informal ways. Some organizations are part of larger systems or are housed within another entity that collects particular types of information about families (e.g. a healthcare organization).

“There needs to be someone in the gap between the system and the families. There needs to be someone who is between the families and the professional world. It’s a kind of translating that is more than just language translations. It’s meaning making.”

There is also a great deal of variation in capacity to collect information, to analyze it, to make meaning out of it, and to share it with external partners. In one small group interview with community connectors who support families in their community in both formal and informal capacities, people shared a desire to participate in meaning making about the information that the families from their community provide; they pointed to this as an opportunity area going forward. One person said, “There needs to be someone in the gap between the system and the families. There needs to be someone who is between the families and the professional world. It’s a kind of translating that is more than just language translations. It’s meaning making.” Some organizations and early learning partners shared they have access to researchers through partnerships (e.g. a community college). Several organizations mentioned having had a staff person or intern at one point in time but no consistent, full-time staff devoted to data collection or systematically gathering information.

Differing Perspectives on Learning about Families’ Needs

We noticed that in our different discussions, how people talked about gathering information to learn about their families differed based on what kind of organization people were part of as well as the role that the person holds within an organization or as a community connector. In general, people who were part of Early Learning Hubs or who held leadership or administrative roles in their organization more often focused on formal, quantitative kinds of information gathering. People who were in roles directly supporting families - in both early learning programs and culturally specific organizations - more often focused on informal ways

to learn about families that included activities, community gatherings, and relationship building.

In addition, we observed that participants approached the discussion of learning about families from two different orientations: 1. Participants who are part of Early Learning Hubs or who hold roles that are more removed from direct service to families tended to be more focused on gathering information about families and communities; and 2. participants who are directly providing services to families through culturally specific programming tended to focus their responses on understanding more about the systems or resources that they and their program could then provide to support families. Several people shared that they themselves – or others in their organization – often do not have an understanding of the resources and support their families are seeking to meet their needs, or whom to even call to ask.

Informal Methods

Many people who directly support families, particularly those who work for a culturally specific organization, described information gathering through activities or interactions that do not primarily or solely focus on learning about families. A few people noted that storytelling or conversations are key. As one person said, “Storytelling is so good and important. In a casual conversation, you will learn about the whole family if you just listen.” Several described programmatic activities, events, and gatherings their organization hosts as serving multiple purposes for both families as well their organization. One person said they learn about their families through, “Family nights for the whole family to come, we share serious topics but there are also games. But I think the most effective contact has been home visits. We learned that most people work in the fields, cleaning, factories.”

“In a casual conversation, you will learn about the whole family if you just listen.”

Original quote in Spanish: “Noches familiares para que venga toda la familia, compartimos temas serios pero hay tambien juegos. Pero creo que el contacto mas efectivo han sido las visitas al domicilio. Aprendimos que la mayoria de la gente trabajan en los campos, limpieza, fabrica.” Translation: “Family nights for the whole family to come, we share serious topics but there are also games. But I think the most effective contact has been home visits. We learned that most people work in the fields, cleaning, factories.”

Formal Methods

When we asked people how they learned about what their families need, some people shared that their program or organization has a formal method for gathering that information. These include:

- Family or parent advisory committees
- Home visits
- Surveying tools through partnerships / grants
- Intake forms
- Workshops where some shared learning happens

Even when people do have a formal method for gathering information, there was variation in how helpful or accurate people thought those approaches were. One person said, “Grants have specific things that they need to meet, but it really comes down to reading the room. What is priority for the grant isn’t necessarily what is the priority for families.” Other people said that even if their program or organization does have a formal method, such as an

intake form or a survey, they don’t see any results or analysis, particularly if their program is part of a larger organization or there is a third party administering the tool. A few people from culturally specific organizations said they prioritize what they learn through more informal methods over information gathering tools, because they find what families share through the more informal methods to be more authentic and to help bolster their relationships with each other.

Managing restraints in the K-12 system

While there are likely many practices and approaches that the K-12 system could consider adopting from early learning programs and culturally specific organizations to learn about and engage with families, there are also restraints and restrictions under which schools and teachers operate. In some cases, there may need to be formal changes in policies or more flexible options put in place to allow schools to adopt those approaches. For instance, several participants noted how important simply observing their families is to learn about what could best support them. The ELTC might be able to include an informal observation component about what kinds of trends teachers are seeing in their classes. In other cases, schools may need to partner with other kinds of organizations that support families in their communities

to achieve a shared goal. The following section explores input on how organizations could work together.

Connecting to and Relationship Building with Families Opportunities to Work Together to Support Early Learning

Many people who participated in the listening sessions and interviews desire more consistent, deeper connections and relationships among the different entities involved in supporting families with young children. Participants recognize the important role that different entities in different systems play for families, including early learning programs, community-based organizations, culturally specific organizations, and the districts and schools that students in their communities either already do attend or will attend. Practical challenges – such as school calendars and communication channels – as well as systemic gaps hinder these connections. We heard many examples of effective local coordination, in-language services, and wrap-around support; however, people consistently shared that they feel like these efforts are still not addressing their community’s and families’ needs.

Even for many programs that have an existing arrangement of some kind in partnership with a school, for instance, people shared they still did not feel connected. One person from a Preschool Promise site housed in a school building described feeling like after many years there was still no relationship between their program and the school itself. Several culturally specific organizations described holding ongoing programming and events at schools in their communities but feeling like there was a lack of welcome or desire to build relationships from the schools.

A few early learning providers and programs noted that the timing of school announcements, such as classroom assignments or event dates, are challenges for partners and community organizations to be able to help make warm handoffs for families to kindergarten and the school system. People often didn’t know about the important events for kindergarten families happening where they wished they could be present to help with a warm handoff until it was too late.

While organizations from some regions shared a deep knowledge of different partners and entities, others expressed a desire to better understand the network of relationships. One person suggested a region-wide roster that laid out which organizations were working with which districts, schools, or organizations already. An Early Learning Hub director shared

plans in their region to conduct an asset mapping exercise with the hopes of understanding gaps in a variety of service areas better.

While many people voiced wanting more collaboration, people acknowledged that they already feel stretched. In a couple of conversations participants shared their personal stories of trying to navigate early learning and care for their own families as a reflection of what the families they serve also struggle with. Another interviewee emphasized the need for more mental health and peer support in programs that support families. We also heard some concerns about where the burden or drive for creating and maintaining partnerships or collaborative efforts would fall.

Ongoing Opportunities for Shared Learning

Relatedly, we heard from people from different organizations and in a variety of roles that they would like to have more ongoing opportunities to learn from each other across organizations, regions, and systems. Because the landscape for what's happening across the state in regards to partnerships and sharing of information is so varied, there is an opportunity for different regions, programs, and systems to learn from each other. While some of this is already happening in some places, it is not universal or consistent. We heard this varies even on a district-by-district basis and school-by-school basis as well. Several people wondered if ODE and DELC might play a role in bringing people together for shared learning in some way.

Creating Ways to Share Information

While many participants said they have their own systems and approaches to learn about families, we often heard that there isn't a way to easily share that information with partners, organizations, and school districts. Several people said they would be open to sharing the information they gather with school systems, but there is no system in place to do that. In one in-person conversation, participants gave an example from their region they view as an effective way to share information, describing "a closed loop system so that the info gets back to the referring org, and the family contact so we know what was done. We ask agencies that are referred to, to [then] fill out feedback forms with questions such as a number on a waiting list."

Very few people talked about how they had used information gathered through the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment when it was in use. Many of the participants focused on

relational aspects versus academic aspects of the kindergarten transition. We did not hear a desire to have an academic assessment during the first days or weeks of kindergarten; however, a couple of people said that they are interested in academic assessments that occur throughout the course of the school year to chart progress.

In addition to wanting to see progress over time for students, people also shared other ways they thought information gathered through the Family Conversation or other ELTC components could be helpful. Two areas of common interest were applying what's learned to outreach and professional development for early educators and seeing trends on a regional level about family needs or gaps in services.

Differing Opinions on Gathering and Sharing Information

There is not widespread agreement about what information formats— particularly between quantitative versus qualitative information - would be most helpful. Some people expressed a high value on storytelling, for example, while others thought that quantitative data would be more helpful to them. As one person said, “Pages and pages of notes from teachers won't work” from the Family Conversation, and they would “need to go from narrative to something quantifiable.” As we mentioned earlier in Section 2. General Observations, these differing opinions point to a tension in the multiple goals of the ELTC in welcoming children and families and building relationships while also gathering information as data to inform decisions about early learning regionally and across the state.

Building Relationships with Partner Organizations and Schools

We also heard similar themes about the importance and value of relationships when the conversations turned to how early learning partners and community and culturally specific organizations work alongside other entities to support families. Notably, people in smaller, less populated communities felt like relationship building was less of a challenge in their communities where “everyone already knows who the kindergarten teacher is.” People frequently shared a desire to be more connected to other programs, organizations, and schools in their community, even while noting that there seem to be many factors preventing these relationships from developing or continuing. Beyond common challenges like time, resources, and staff capacity, people shared a sense that other entities weren't interested or didn't value a relationship with their organization.

We often heard people express discontent with the schools that the families they serve attend. Several people from both early childhood partners and culturally specific organizations described having an informal or formal relationship with schools in their community. A few said they have programs located in a space within a school; however, that was the extent of the relationship. One person said they had had more informal relationships with individuals within a school, but if that person left their position, the relationship with the school ceased. We heard a couple of people say one key step for them in building a relationship with schools would be to receive information ahead of time about key events at the school, such as Kindergarten Round Up or a cultural family night. They can then share those events with families in their programs to help encourage attendance and assist in building relationships ahead of the first day of kindergarten.

Original quote in Spanish: "No siempre el distrito esta disponible. Seria una buena conexion con ODE para facilitar esas conexiones - yo voy porque conozco personalmente a la maestra de kinder. Con las mismas familias que conozco hago el contacto con la escuela. Si fuera mas facil que el ODE podria facilitar algo asi." Translation: "The district is not always available in supporting us to do this. It would be good for ODE to facilitate those connections - I go because I know the kindergarten teacher personally. With the same families that I know I make contact with the school. It would be easier if it were ODE, to help facilitate something like this."

A few people working for early childhood programs voiced a desire to better understand what role the state agencies have or could have in helping to bridge gaps between early childhood programs and the K-12 school system. One person wondered if ODE could also help to facilitate connections, saying "I would like to know more about the activities they are going to do in kindergarten, so I can send the parent's home with those materials - phonetic sounds, cutting with scissors, etc. The district is not always available in supporting us to do this. It would be good for ODE to facilitate those connections - I go because I know the kindergarten teacher personally. With the same families that I know I make contact with the school. It would be easier if it were ODE, to help facilitate something like this." As we didn't hear specific ideas for how ODE and / or DELC might help bridge this gap, ODE and DELC might consider further community engagement focused on this question.

Some of the people and organizations we heard from are already involved in walking alongside families in the transition to kindergarten with the school, but these arrangements are not consistent and do not appear to be the norm among participants. Many people

expressed a strong desire to be part of the transition regularly, offering to attend Kindergarten Round Up or Open Houses alongside the families they support or to have teachers visit their programs to meet families and children in a space where they are already comfortable. Oftentimes, having a school leader who prioritizes this activity as part of the transition to kindergarten has been the key in establishing a relationship; however, staff turnover can make maintaining the relationship from year to year a challenge.

In a few conversations, people shared stories of supporting families in trying to respond to the paperwork involved in enrolling their child in school is often the family's first

“We make sure every family leaves us with birth certificate and immunization records. It would be so much smoother if we could help facilitate getting that info to the school district.”

interaction with kindergarten and their school – a kind of “paper” welcome. While people noted that in general the paperwork can be confusing and daunting, for families who are unfamiliar with the United States school system or who speak a language other than English, the task is daunting. Often these materials aren't available in

languages other than English and – sometimes – Spanish. Some partners offered that they can help navigate this part of the process with families, particularly if families are already enrolled in some way in their programs already. One person said, “We've been told that our families' reading level is 4th grade or under. Then they have to do all this paperwork. We make sure every family leaves us with birth certificate and immunization records. It would be so much smoother if we could help facilitate getting that info to the school district. We already have most of that info. If not, we work with [families] to try to get it. We have funding that we can use for something like that paying to get a birth certificate.” They often already have the information the paperwork is asking for, even if it is on a different type of form. Sometimes early learning programs already work with families on paperwork for school, and even if they don't currently, some organizations think they can play a bigger role – if invited to by schools.

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Our conversations over the course of spring and summer 2024 raised a number of areas for as DELC and ODE to consider as they work to continue to expand the Family Conversation approach throughout Oregon and to redesign the Early Learning Transition Check-In. In addition, they also raise more general approaches ODE and DELC could consider in a community engagement process on topics beyond the Family Conversation and the ELTC. Some of these recommendations depend on ongoing relationship building as well as building relationships with new partners. This process itself provided important lessons in taking the time and making adjustments to ensure the voices of people who have historically been excluded from public decisions are heard.

We offer recommendations, based on what we heard, in three categories: Recommendations Regarding the Family Conversation and the ELTC, Recommendations Related to Strengthening Relationships, and Recommendations beyond the Family Conversation and the ELTC.

Recommendations Regarding the Family Conversation

This particular engagement process marks the third time that OKT has partnered to with ODE and DELC to gather input about the Family Conversation. The previous engagement processes focused on hearing from the families and educators whose schools participated in the Family Conversation pilot in 2022 and 2023. We recommend that ODE and DELC staff pay particular attention to how they might support schools in strengthening relationships with early learning partners and culturally specific organizations

- Consider **focusing future engagement related to the Family Conversation and the ELTC on particular topics** raised by participants. For example, through all three of the engagement processes, we heard a desire to further look at supporting families during this transition whose students have already been identified as experiencing a disability or whose families may be starting or in the midst of an assessment process.

- Explore how ODE and DELC might **offer basic information about schools in Oregon and kindergarten in particular in multiple languages** for both families as well as for early learning partners and culturally specific organizations to use in supporting families. This could be an additional component of the ELTC and / or part of materials used during the Family Conversation.
- **Include families themselves in future engagement around potential additional components of the ELTC.** While this engagement process did include people who themselves have had similar experiences as people in their communities, including in the kindergarten transition process, this process was primarily focused on organizations and either what they may need or what they had observed from the families they support. The two previous community engagement processes OKT conducted with ODE and DELC around the ELTC also were limited in scope to hear from only families and educators who participated in a pilot year of the Family Conversation and their experience with that component. In addition, including more families in a future ELTC engagement process could help to establish the Family Conversation as a statewide standard for welcoming families and students to Oregon schools.

Recommendations for Strengthening Relationships

Some of the input that early learning partners and culturally specific organizations shared pertain to relationships with schools and districts in their communities rather than ODE and DELC. There are a couple of suggestions based on what we heard that schools, districts, early learning partners, and culturally specific organizations across the state could focus on to both strengthen relationships and support families through the kindergarten transition and beyond. These also reflect what we heard from families and educators during the previous community engagement processes around the Family Conversation. Both of these could help in building long term, authentic relationships between schools and partners from early learning programs and culturally specific organizations in the community. These are by no means the only ways people might strengthen relationships, but we offer them as two that tie directly to the Family Conversation and reflect what participants shared.

We recommend the following based on what we heard:

- **Consider broadening a “whole community” approach to how schools implement the Family Conversation to include trusted, known people to help provide a warm hand-off.** Schools and districts could intentionally connect to early learning partners and culturally specific organizations in their communities on co-identifying roles people from those entities could play before or even during the Family Conversation. This could also include “experienced” families whose children have already gone through schools in the community as well as other informal community connectors or leaders who might serve as a bridge between community members and institutions like schools.
- **Co-Create a community outreach and communication plan with local early learning programs and culturally specific organizations for the kindergarten transition and beyond.** This could mean creating a shared calendar of the important dates and activities related to families getting to know their child’s school and transitioning to kindergarten as well as the events hosted by early learning partners and culturally specific organizations. It could include creating designated time and space for a person from an early learning partner or culturally specific organization to be present at an event related to the start of kindergarten (for example, Kindergarten Round Up, cultural night for families, school tour, or a welcome table during the days the Family Conversation takes place for families).

Recommendations Beyond the Family Conversation

As mentioned above, this process provided space for participants to share more broadly about their experiences supporting families and children in many ways. We offer the following recommendations for ODE and DELC to consider more broadly and / or around topics beyond the scope of the Family Conversation and ELTC. These broader recommendations include:

- Consider **broadening engagement with different types of organizations that ODE and DELC might not have historically included**, such as including people who provide culturally specific early childhood programs in libraries or who support families with young children through particular county programs for communities who experience disparities in education.

- Explore how **DELIC and ODE might act as co-conveners to bring together people for more peer-to-peer learning and support to happen across systems**, connecting with early learning partners, community partners, and culturally specific organizations to continue to understand what is happening for families in early learning across the state. While we heard participants are looking to ODE and DELIC to play some role in bringing people across systems together, this engagement process didn't explore this idea in depth. ODE and DELIC might conduct a community engagement process to focus on what specifically people would like to see ODE and DELIC do in this role.
- **Explore how ODE and DELIC can support building connections for information sharing across systems and organizations.** This could also include building relationships with community connectors to help interpret and make meaning from information that early learning partners, culturally specific organizations, families, and other community members provide.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

As OKT concludes this third engagement process with ODE and DELIC on supporting families and students' transition to kindergarten, we were struck by people's commitment to walking alongside families and children as they begin schooling in Oregon. People recognize that a number of different entities and systems often come together at this moment, creating a complex landscape for families as well as early learning partners, community and culturally specific organizations, and schools. And people continue to want to find ways to work across those different systems to create better support for Oregon families. Doing so will take convening people to learn from each other and test out new approaches. It will also take intentional efforts to build and nurture relationships.

Ultimately, many people said, families want assurance that the adults they are sending their children to will love and care for them. Several people shared that they often hear how much their families value education for their children and want to see their child in school,

but at the same time they have deep concerns and fears about their child feeling safe and loved. As one person put it, “Change the mindset from ‘you have to get your child ready for school’ to ‘we need to get our schools ready for these children.’”

As ODE and DELC continue to scale the Family Conversation statewide and consider potential additional components of the ELTC, we encourage ODE and DELC to consider ways to invite more families to participate in envisioning the warm welcome they want to see for children in Oregon as they start their K-12 school journey.

EARLY LEARNING PARTNERS LISTENING SESSION

WELCOME!

Please share in the chat:

- Name
- Where you are joining from today
- How you're connected to early learning or families with young children in your community

OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE

Oregon's Kitchen Table is a statewide program that creates ways for community members in Oregon to influence the decisions that affect their lives.



TODAY'S DISCUSSION

Our Goal:

To hear and learn from each other about how we can understand the wide variety of early learning experiences that families and children have.

This will help us better meet our early learners' needs.



BACKGROUND



- PAIRS
- SHARE



- GROUP DISCUSSION
(TOGETHER OR IN 2 GROUPS)
- SHARE



NEXT STEPS AND APPRECIATIONS

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

*help us hear
everybody*

*be respectful of
your neighbors*

*listen with
curiosity*

*everyone brings
different
experiences and
ideas*



EARLY LEARNING TRANSITION CHECK-IN

FIRST COMPONENT: THE FAMILY CONVERSATION

Dedicated time for kindergarten educators to connect with families one-on-one at the beginning of the school year and learn about each child.

PURPOSE



Support families and kindergarten educators connect



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.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND TIMELINE



2022

Collaboration with advisory panel and small listening sessions to begin redesign

Fall - Year 1 Family Conversation Pilot with 9 schools

Family and Educator feedback sessions with OKT



2023

DELCL and ODE made changes to The Family Conversation based on OKT report

Fall - Year 2 Family Conversation Pilot with 33 schools

Family and Educator feedback sessions with OKT



2024

Listening Sessions with Early Learning Community Partners

Preparing for Fall 2024

THE FAMILY CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

- What are your hopes and dreams for your child?
- What brings your child joy?
- What kinds of child care did your family have for your child? For example, were they cared for only by you or another parent or guardian? Or was your child cared for by other people, like friends, other relatives, or teachers?
- What experiences, programs and/or services did your child receive or participate in to help them learn and grow?
- Of the experiences, programs and/or services you just mentioned, which one would you say was the most helpful to your child and your family?
- Which experiences, 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?

FALL 2022: QUOTES FROM THE FAMILY CONVERSATION ~



Hopes and dreams

- I hope he develops strength and resilience as well as problem solving skills
- To appreciate and enjoy culture and Spanish, for it not to be negative



Joy

- My child enjoys helping the teacher and making sure her classmates don't feel left out.
- He loves so many things, anything new. He loves things with broad explanations, science magic tricks, and experiments.



What else do you want me to know?

- My child has a speech delay. When he doesn't know people he is very timid and nervous.
- I wish my daughter had a Head start program. My child is new to this area we just moved her in February.



Questions for the teacher

- How can I help teach him to read?
- If he qualified for special services at NWRESD what does that mean for him at school? Will he have extra support?

PAIRS

6 minutes in groups of 2



What would a warm, welcoming first experience with schools look like for your families?

- What is important to know about your families' culture and community that influences families as their children transition into kindergarten?
- What has been helpful for you to learn or understand to be able to support your families?



NEXT STEPS



OKT will put together a summary report for DELC and ODE, and to share back with you.

We'll also have the report from the 2023 family and educator feedback

DELC and ODE will continue to work on adjusting the Family Conversation and supporting more schools implement it with their teachers and families

Potential development of any identified additional components