

Community Engagement

Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan

Oregon's Kitchen Table
December 2024



Community Input on Oregon’s New Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan

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INTRODUCTION

During the Fall of 2024, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) partnered with Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) to engage Oregonians about how best to improve the learning and experiences of immigrant and refugee students at school. This engagement happened before, during, and after the 2024 election, in which immigration was a major topic of conversation. We heard concerns about how potential and then expected changes in federal immigration policy will impact immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon and the organizations that serve them. We also heard concerns that changes in immigration policy, funding, and the scapegoating of immigrants in public discourse will make it more difficult for organizations to connect with and serve communities effectively. At the same time, people are also excited that these conversations were happening and hopeful that Oregon will continue to support immigrant and refugee families and students in our state.

There were recurrent themes in our engagement which we have grouped into categories here for readability, although the stories people shared tend to cut across all of these categories. As we shared the goals of the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan, across all conversations, a substantial majority of people identified parent and family engagement as their top priority. People shared with us how engaging immigrant and refugee families in their children’s education, creating welcoming school environments, including students’ languages, customs and cultures in their classroom education, and supporting students’ social and emotional wellbeing are all important aspects of students’ success.

We are grateful to share with you these reflections at a moment where there is so much opportunity for ODE and for school districts to take concrete actions to partner with and support immigrant and refugee students and families. There was a high level of excitement and interest in the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan and in participating in this engagement. In particular, the community organizers who were part of OKT’s team were enthusiastic about the opportunity to focus on this topic. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to share their insight and hopeful about how this new Student Success Plan can support immigrant and refugee students in

Oregon. People are hopeful that this input will create tangible change and improve the ways that schools support immigrant and refugee students.

The following report consists of an Executive Summary followed by the full report, which includes the following sections:

- A description of the project’s outreach and engagement activities;
- General observations from across the entire community engagement process;
- Insights about what student success means;
- Reflections on creating welcoming school environments;
- Opportunities for engagement;
- A brief conclusion; and
- Appendices with conversation materials and process details

This report is not a scientific study, nor a presentation of the facts about issues facing immigrant and refugee communities, nor a representation of all of the many immigrant and refugee communities across Oregon. Rather, it is a recounting of a series of conversations over a particular period of time. It does not offer a comprehensive list of every comment shared. We do include a selection of comments we heard directly or indirectly. Quotes and comments included in the report either illustrate a particular point in someone’s own words or echo what other people shared.

This report is now in the hands of ODE, as well as those who participated, to help – alongside other information, experiences, and ideas – in making decisions about the interim Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan and ultimately, how to improve the learning and experiences of immigrant and refugee students and families in Oregon.

“How can education be shaped and changed by what these kids have to offer? By the people it serves? That it’s much more relevant...that education is an opportunity for community building, that it honors cultures and community coming in and works for white kids too.” - Person who worked at organization that serves immigrant and refugee communities in Multnomah County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 1532, which directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to develop and carry out a statewide plan to improve the learning and experiences of immigrant and refugee students at school. ODE partnered with Oregon’s Kitchen Table to hear from refugee and immigrant communities across Oregon about what they would like to see in the plan. In the fall of 2024, over 450 people participated in the different forms of engagement activities. People participated in six languages.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the engagement process as well as high level findings.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

As part of implementing SB 1532, ODE sought to hear from youth and families that are immigrants and refugees, as well as community-based organizations serving those youth and families. OKT used the following methods to reach people and hear their thoughts, experiences and perspectives:

- Individual interviews with 13 people
- Community events and community conversations led by community organizers and partners to gather input from families in their communities; and

- A series of 3 Zoom conversations with community organizations, entities, and groups who serve immigrant and refugee families.

FINDINGS

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

- Many people recognize that schools—as educational institutions and places where other community members and resources come together—play a critical role in supporting families as a whole in connecting with support and being successful in a variety of ways.
- Immigrant and refugee communities comprise individuals and families with a vast range of experiences, ideas, and beliefs.
- There is a significant desire for increased representation of immigrant and refugee families in school and district staff. Several people suggested that schools could consider this as an opportunity to bring in newcomer parents as volunteers or hire people from immigrant and refugee families as school staff.
- Engagement took place during the 2024 national election when immigration was a central issue. Many people have concerns about supporting immigrant and refugee families and students as well as the organizations who serve them. At the same time, people voiced their hope that the state will create and implement strategies to help immigrant and refugee students in Oregon schools.

HOW PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES THINK ABOUT STUDENT SUCCESS:

- There is a wide range of perspectives about what “student success” means. These different perspectives include academic outcomes (such as good grades) as well as community outcomes (such as leading to better opportunities for the next generation), social outcomes (such as strong connections and relationships with peers), and emotional outcomes (such as a student's ability to feel safe and confident).
- We heard a tension that many people feel in wanting to see their students learn to navigate U.S. society while at the same time maintaining their cultural identity.

- Many people prioritize culturally responsive pedagogy and including students' cultures, language, and customs in school curriculum.
- Opportunities for social connection are key for student success in a variety of ways. One overarching strategy that people frequently raised is to intentionally include immigrant students and families in school activities in ways that acknowledge their home cultures, create ways for them to directly participate, and consider families' barriers and needs (such as planning school activities to occur at different times and days when working families can attend).

REFLECTIONS ON WELCOMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS:

- Creating strategies to involve parents and families in their students' education is of high importance. People want to see strategies to ensure appropriate translation and interpretation services, support for families learning to navigate the school system, as well as ways for families and students themselves to be directly involved in planning and participating in school events and activities.
- People are interested in increasing school staff's understanding about students' experiences as well as different cultural expectations around schools, from the food provided to the role that parents expect to play in their children's education.
- Food is an important factor in multiple ways. This includes finding ways to meet dietary needs that students from immigrant and refugee communities have. Food can also provide an opportunity for schools to directly involve families and students in activities and events and to support families and students in their efforts to connect and build relationships within the school community.
- Having school staff who have similar lived experiences as immigrant and refugee families in their communities is key to both creating a welcoming school environment as well as to help families understand and navigate the school system.
- Transitions into or out of school or different grades are points that many people want to see increased support. Many people talked about the transition into kindergarten, moving from middle school to high school, and navigating the

different post-secondary pathways. In addition to these specific transitions, we also heard general interest in making sure that schools are prepared to support students new to the US - particularly those coming from high trauma environments - in entering the school system for the very first time.

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

The people who participated in this engagement process are eager to be in ongoing conversations about this topic. We encourage ODE to communicate updates and tangible outcomes with participants in this engagement. In the future, ODE could consider ways to expand engagement to include a wider range of the immigrant and refugee communities that are in Oregon.

ODE could also focus future engagement efforts to include the voices of immigrant and refugee families in particular parts of the state, such as areas with lower populations and communities in Eastern Oregon.

Many of the suggestions people had are things that ODE can not implement, so we encourage ODE to share these insights with school districts. These suggestions also provide opportunities for schools and districts themselves to engage and partner with immigrant and refugee families in their communities.

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: ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND PARTICIPATION

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The overarching goal of this community engagement was to better understand a variety of community perspectives to inform the interim Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan. The purpose of this community engagement effort was twofold:

1. To hear from immigrant and refugee students, families, and community-based organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities about their experiences, desires and values for improving immigrant and refugee students' learning and experiences at schools in Oregon; and
2. To hear from people who have not been part of this discussion or decision-making process in the past.

Appendix A. provides additional details of this process design.

PARTICIPATION

Throughout this project and this report, we are committed to providing information about participation in ways that protect individual's anonymity, so we have omitted details that could be personally revealing.¹ Here are some highlights regarding participation:

- Over 450 people participated across the different forms of engagement.
- At the start of the planning for engagement, OKT conducted 9 individual or small group interviews with 13 people.
- OKT hosted 3 conversations on Zoom.
- 9 culturally specific community conversations organized by OKT organizers (one with Nepali families, one with Southeast Asian youth, one with Spanish and Mam

¹ For more information about OKT's commitment to protecting peoples' personal information when they participate in community engagement processes, visit our website: <https://www.oregonskitchentable.org/about/faqs>.

speakers, two with Muslim communities, one with Ukrainian youth and one with their parents, one with Chinese parents, and one with Vietnamese parents). Over 250 people participated across these conversations.

- OKT joined three standing meetings of organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities to share about the community engagement process, invite people to be involved, and lead short conversations about perceptions of student success.
- People who participated identified themselves as living in or serving people in Multnomah, Washington, Lincoln, Deschutes, Marion, and Clackamas counties. Some people said they serve communities across the state.
- Conversations were led in Mam, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Arabic, Nepali and English.
- Participants self-identified in the various following ways, including by country of origin, language, and/or ethnic group:
 - Lao, Hmong, African, Filipino, Indian, Lu Mien, Chinese, Mexican-American, Rohingya;
 - Indigenous² to North or South America;
 - Spanish, Chuukese, Popti, Mam, and Somali speakers,
 - and/or from these countries: Algeria, Bangladesh, Burma, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Micronesia, Morocco, Nepal, Palestine, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Yemen;

² Throughout engagement activities, we did not ask people explicitly to share any personal information as activities often occurred in group conversation settings where people have different levels of comfort in sharing personal information. Many people did share their own stories and volunteered information about their countries of origin, immigration status, first language, and where they live now. When people share information about their identities, we use their own words as much as possible. As a result, there is some inconsistency in how people identified themselves, such as by country of origin vs. by ethnicity, as well as inconsistency in how much specificity people used to self-identify themselves. As a result, there is some ambiguity about what ‘indigenous’ meant to each individual who self-identified that way.

- Permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolee, recent immigrants, first-generation descendants of immigrants, and people with temporary protected status.
- Several people identified as white.
- Parents of children ranging in age from 0 to 18, including some students who are enrolled in dual language immersion programs. Some people also mentioned that they have children over 18 years of age.
- Students who participated ranged in age from 8 to 18 and included middle school and high school students. We also heard from a few university students and recent university graduates.

SECTION 2: OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Over the course of the two months we conducted community engagement activities, we noticed some cross-cutting patterns in the input people gave. Some of those came through in the language that people used to describe their perceptions and experiences. We also noticed some distinctions in how people perceived or defined different values and beliefs about schools and education. Several of these are explored in more detail in the other sections, but since they cut across different areas, communities, and topics, we want to note these patterns. These include:

- Schools are one important part of immigrants’ overall introduction to US communities and culture as many families interact with a variety of entities upon their arrival. Many people recognize that schools - as educational institutions and places where other community members and resources come together - play a critical role in supporting families as a whole in connecting with support and being successful in a variety of ways. Many families see education as - in the words of one person - “a means for the community to better themselves, succeed, and support each other.”
- Immigrant and refugee communities comprise individuals and families with a vast range of experiences, home cultures, languages, relationships to schools and

education, locations in the state, economic statuses, types of historical and recent traumas, and access to a community of people who share their culture and language. This was a recurrent theme in our conversations.

- There is a significant desire for increased representation of immigrant and refugee families in school and district staff. This was brought up as a way to support families as well as to provide language and support for students. Several people voiced frustration that there are too few or no district staff who reflect the identities of population of students they serve. Many people suggested that there is an opportunity to hire newcomer parents and address multiple needs simultaneously: addressing educational staff burnout, increasing numbers of staff who share students' cultures and language, creating income opportunities for newcomer adults, and helping parents learn to navigate the US school system.
- We also heard people reflect on the significant geographic differences across Oregon. Even within communities, people talked about different waves of immigration and the very different needs of incoming populations. People talked about some regions and schools, particularly in the Portland Metro area, as having well-developed, excellent, proactive supports, whereas other parts of the state are newer to providing support and may be in a more "reactive mode" in trying to support immigrant and refugee families. One person in a more rural area said there is a large immigrant population and no representation or support within the district, besides the Migrant Education Program at the ESD, which they feel is siloed from the rest of the district. Another person voiced that in their small town, it feels like there are two parallel communities that are not integrated. People agreed that for very small immigrant communities in less populated areas, it can be very isolating in terms of finding peers and extra challenging to provide resources and support to families in their own language.

“Our school district needs to create programs specifically to support students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds...They have increased access to language interpretation and translation, but at a percentage that doesn’t reflect the population. Families that have lived here for many years feel that the system has failed them.”
- Lincoln County community member

SECTION 3: STUDENT SUCCESS

WHAT DOES “SUCCESS” MEAN?

There was a wide range of perspectives about what “student success” means. Overall, we heard a tension between learning to navigate U.S. society without losing their cultural identity. For some people, good grades and graduation are the markers of success. Some people focused on education as a pathway to better work opportunities and allowing both the student and their family to have a better life.

Other people described success in terms of students’ continued connection to their home country, being of benefit to their community of origin, and maintaining their identity and having pride in their origins. For example, one person told us about their child earning an academic scholarship to return to Nepal; others connected these two ideas, hoping that students will become skilled so that they can be of benefit to their community of origin. In a community conversation in Deschutes County, 80% of the participants agreed that cultural preservation in schools is important or very important to them.

“You cannot be successful unless you know who you are and are proud of your origin.”
– Washington County parent

Other people described success as being able to pursue their interests, gain skills related to what they are interested in, and apply themselves to the extent of their abilities. Several people felt that students showing interest in learning and being curious was the marker of success. Related to this concept that students are able to pursue their interests, we heard people talk about students being able to navigate the system, to understand the tools and resources available to them, to advocate for themselves, and to become self-sufficient. One parent shared a story about their child, who immigrated at age 8, thriving and

succeeding academically in a Dual Language Immersion (DLI) school, but then struggling when she started at a predominately white university on the east coast. The parent wished that the student had been given greater adaptability, social and emotional resilience, and exposure to dominant culture. This story relates to another theme that we heard from people who felt that fluency in English is a marker of success.

Yet other people described success as feeling a sense of safety and belonging. For example, one person voiced the hope that their student will have a strong social network and participate in extracurricular activities and school clubs.

We also heard from some parents that their students misunderstand what they expect from them. For instance, one person shared that youth may think that their parents expect them to be doctors and lawyers and that they only care about grades, but in fact the parents are thinking about leadership, communication skills, mental health, and whether their student is helping others, as well as academic skills and success.

*“In my culture success in education means success in life”
– High school student who participated in conversation in Washington County*

*“People stereotype Asian kids as being smart, but that’s not always the case. Success can happen outside of school too.”
– Southeast Asian high school student*

At the same time, many people also brought up that students' fluency in English and in navigating US society creates challenges for parents and families. One person said, "when we talk with our own children, we feel like we need an interpreter." A young person brought up that in her home culture, there was a belief that girls should not be educated and should get married young. She emphasized that parents need to be included in students' education, so that parents will be more likely to support students' ideas about their own futures while still staying connected to their home cultures and language.

"When I first came to this school, my child was afraid to speak because of the different language and culture. She became withdrawn. With the enthusiastic help of the Chinese teacher, she became cheerful and her English improved a lot. Student success is not only about academics, but also personal growth and social skills. We focus on whether students can enjoy school life and balance study and life. The school can pay more attention to students' mental health." – Chinese parent

"I've also learned that being successful is also connected to being healthy - either mentally or physically - the wellness of the person. They are connected because if you are depressed, you won't have the mental or physical capacity to be successful in the classroom. If you're sick, you won't be able to attend classes, study, do homework." – Congolese community member

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

People pointed out that students from immigrant and refugee communities often face many barriers, whether academic, social, or emotional, to success. Immigrant and refugee students are often facing language differences, cultural adjustments, and in many cases, the trauma of feeling alone in a new place that is different from their home. Overall, people called for greater understanding of these underlying issues and more resources and support to ensure that all students have access to a good education, including both academic support and the social and emotional support that is necessary for their development.

“For student to be successful, they need to be settled outside - where they eat, sleep, how they eat, the students around them. Otherwise, students can experience depression because of homesickness, feeling like you miss home and feeling like you don’t belong.”
– Washington County community

The importance of social connection and friendship was a significant theme. In almost every conversation, people focused on the importance of social connection for immigrant students and families. One of the barriers that many people brought up is language; many people also shared that implicit cultural norms about friendship also create barriers for students to develop social bonds and feel safe, respected, and valued. For instance, one person shared a

“Students don’t speak the language but they also don’t speak the language of social rules, culture, structures, or system.” – Person who works with immigrant community in Deschutes County

story about a boy who preferred to play with girls but felt embarrassed because a classmate had told him that “boys don’t play with girls.” Another person commented that the way school days are set up influences how students form bonds. They shared that in Ukraine, students stay with the same small class for 11 years and make strong bonds, whereas here students were moving classrooms and classmates in each class.

“Counseling and friend bonding help me learn better and feel less restraint.”
– Southeast Asian high school student

Changing schools also came up as a barrier to making good friends, especially in middle and high school.

There is a general need for activities that allow students to connect with each other and develop friendships despite language barriers, such as culturally specific clubs, sports, or peer mentorship programs. Some people talked about focusing on activities and opportunities for social connection as a way of focusing on mental/behavioral health that is more culturally relevant than a one-on-one therapy model. One student shared that high school was easier for them than earlier grades because they were able to start the AAPI club to make the space they needed. SUN programs and community-led afterschool programs were also brought up as successful examples. One significant barrier that several parents brought up is transportation, especially for parents who are working. Overall, many people felt that increasing social connectedness and friendship will help students meet other goals.

“Going to high school helped a lot since elementary school and middle school didn’t have a lot of Asian kids. Being part of an Asian club helped minority students at school feel more welcome.”
– High school student in Multnomah County

“When thinking of behavioral health, don’t think of it as one-on-one therapy - it looks different - a women’s sewing group or a soccer team.”
– Staff member at agency that serves immigrant and refugee communities

While parents and organization staff didn’t frequently bring up bullying or discrimination, students shared stories about stereotyping and bullying of immigrant or refugee students. In one conversation, some participants felt that lack of language support and lack of understanding by school districts about immigrants’ culture leads to stereotypes and bullying. People shared that supportive leadership, repercussions for discrimination, and raising awareness about cultural traditions and foods are supportive to combat bullying.

“My brother was targeted even though English is his first language...I think that teacher awareness also relates to students. When teachers are more informed this impacts students' perceived opinions.” – High school student in Multnomah County

INCLUDING STUDENTS' CULTURES AND LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM

We heard general excitement about the idea of culturally responsive education and including students' cultures, language, and customs in school curriculum. In particular, in some conversations, students said that this was their highest priority. We also heard general agreement that for the most part, culturally responsive teaching and curriculum is not happening now, with a few exceptions of parents whose students are in Dual Language Immersion schools. We heard from many

“Faith is important to most of these families. Most of these students their faith is what shapes them therefore to help them feel included, them and their families need to see that there is space for them to learn and practice their faith at school.”

- Comment from conversation that included students from Africa, Asia and the Middle East

people that students' staying connected to their home culture is a priority and that they would like to see schools help with that, given how much time their children spend apart from their families and in the school setting and with peers from other cultures.

Suggestions include:

- professional development for educators;
- inclusion of multicultural content in curricula and offering focused curriculum like Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies;
- space for students to practice their faith including prayer rooms, wearing hijab, and learning Arabic so they can read the Qu'ran;
- culturally specific electives or afterschool activities like Ukrainian folk dancing, Nepali or Arabic language classes;
- offering a wider range of languages at the high school level;

- challenging perspectives on historical events that promote fear or hatred of particular countries or religious groups;
- including religious and cultural holidays on school calendars;
- and celebrating cultural heritage days or holidays at school.

“Please stop pushing the narrative of 'Never Forget.’ This often monopolizes on this country's fear mongering nature. If you choose to teach about 9/11, make sure you teach about how millions of Muslims and immigrants have been and continue to be killed by our foreign policy.” – Washington County parent

Many people also brought up language as a significant barrier to academic success, which speaks to the need for adequate language assistance for new students who are learning English.

Alternative school options like dual language immersion (DLI) schools, home schooling, and private schools also came up a few times, each time with the hope that those approaches to schooling can continue and be supported by the Student Success Plan. People spoke positively about their experiences in Dual Language Immersion programs. In particular, people commented on being able to connect more easily with teachers and administrators because they speak families’ languages. One person said that they’d like more awareness and outreach about DLI programs because often families in their community were not aware of it.

“It was a big challenge and a long wait till we got a Dari family liaison...In terms of language, Dari speaking students can’t access curriculum because there are no translation provided in their language. Yet they are brushed off and asked to do the work and get a pass in the course.” – Educator

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

“We noticed that kids who are older than 14...kids told us they know what they want to be when they grow up but have no idea how to get there. We’re trying to have more sessions to introduce kids to career and college pathways and explain the road map of how to get there...we need to involve parents in that, too. We think that will help kids attend school and focus on academics to meet their future goals.” - Person who works at organization that serves immigrant and refugee communities

We heard in many conversations that involving parents in conversations about students’ futures and what it takes for them to be successful at school is important so that students have support at home. In particular, we heard many stories about how parents need to be involved in understanding college and career pathways, including how afterschool activities or internships relate to students’ futures. Cost, transportation, and how extracurricular activities mesh with responsibilities at home can be barriers for students to participate. One Rohingya student told us, “it’s great to seek youth voices but include parents too. If youth want to go to school but parents don’t support...that can happen too...if you’re providing resources just to the student, it doesn’t work.”

SECTION 4: WELCOMING SCHOOLS

We started our conversations by asking people about what makes them feel welcome, and then more specifically what a warm, welcoming school environment looks like. We heard several common themes around what helps people experience belonging in general, such as seeing people they know or people who look like them; being invited to take a seat at the table; sharing food and drinks; and being welcomed in their own languages.

When we asked people about what make for a warm, welcoming school environment, several themes emerged:

- Inclusion and acknowledgement of new arrivals;

- Inviting immigrant and refugee families to participate in school activities, that take into account languages, cultural considerations (such as traditional food, music, or dance), including ways for both youth and families to have an active role in leading and organizing;
- Clear communication in students’ and parents’ home languages, including updates about students’ progress, ways to ask questions, and suggestions about how parents can support their children;
- Readily available language assistance and translation services;
- Students and parents being able to see themselves reflected in school staff and leadership;
- Food that is familiar and meets students’ dietary needs;
- Teachers and staff who are supportive and understanding;
- Cultural diversity is valued, respected and celebrated, including displaying flags of students’ home countries, celebrating cultural holidays and events, creating opportunities for families to share cultures, etc.; and,
- School events are planned at times and with a frequency that make it easier for working families to attend.

Here are some of the comments people shared in the community conversations.

“A warm school environment is where nobody is judged for where they come from.” – Comment from conversation with students from Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas

“Being greeted and acknowledged by someone when I arrive helps me feel supported and welcome, especially if I’m nervous or shy at first.” – High school student in Multnomah County

“During every Chinese festival, the teacher would invite new immigrant parents to discuss what Chinese food is available and help decorate the event. The teacher's enthusiasm made us feel respected and valued. I feel that I can integrate into this community more easily and get to know other parents.”

– Parent in Multnomah County

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Once again, many people identified parent and family engagement as a top priority for supporting immigrant and refugee students. We heard from both families, as well as people from community organizations, that parents often lack basic information about how to participate and navigate the school system here. For example, we heard that many people are unsure about what their responsibilities in their children’s education are, how to communicate with the school, what to expect at a parent-teacher conference, how to check students’ grades, and how to navigate applications, such as FAFSA or applications to post-secondary institutions.

Many parents expressed frustration over the combination of the need and the difficulty of staying involved in their children’s education. People brought up that parents are expected to actively participate in their children’s education in the U.S., which differs from the educational systems in some countries and cultures. Additionally, people brought up that schools’ expectations of parents are often at odds with the realities of families’ lives with–working parents, often in multiple and/or low-paying jobs, as well as learning a new language and possibly caring for other children.

“Many parents don't fully understand the U.S. education system or their child's abilities. They sometimes feel unsure about their child's progress, even if teachers say they're doing okay.” – Vietnamese parent

“Engagement week, pink pajamas week...sometimes when your kid brings home an announcement you don’t understand what it’s about. It’s ok with a kindergarten or elementary kid but not high schoolers, because there are rules about how they are conduct in school and how that impacts future decisions.” – Person who works at organization that serves Ukrainian community

When we asked people what strategies could support families in navigating or better understanding the school system, several people offered suggestions they thought could be helpful. These include:

- Providing basic information in parents’ own languages
- Increasing access to interpretation and translated materials
- Cultural orientation sessions
- Supporting activities or classes for parents, such as language classes, a community garden, or sewing group that connect parents with each other and the school
- Featuring school announcements and information in culturally specific community magazines or forums that already exist
- Providing compensation, vouchers for transportation, and/or childcare at school events and schedule events in such a way that it is more possible for parents to balance participation with meeting other needs
- Hiring district or school staff who share students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds who can help bridge the language and cultural barriers parents may be facing.

In general, many people brought up the differences between cultural norms and expectations about how parents engage with schools between families' home countries and the US. In some cases, parents expected to be included, even if they were not familiar with the systems students were navigating, which can be a source of frustration. Other people we heard from shared that in their cultures, teachers were like parents and parents were not expected to be as directly involved in students' educations. We also heard a range of the types of communication that parents would prefer. One

*“Many parents who speak languages other than English or Spanish struggle to stay informed. Most messages are sent in English and Spanish, so those who can’t read or understand either language are left out of important updates. This has created many instances of missed communication that affect their ability to support their children’s education, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration. Without clear information, misunderstandings and missed opportunities become common.” –
Comment from community conversation in Lincoln County*

participant felt that clear, simple information on paper would be most helpful for her community. In another conversation, parents shared that they would like to be communicated with through text and email, and some felt that teachers are being too quick or short with them, and would like staff to take time to have a conversation. One student shared that her parents did not expect to hear from the school and perceived any communication as a problem, a bad sign. As shared above, many people view increased engagement and communication with parents and families as a high priority, though the details of what that may look like differs by culture and place.

While nearly everyone would like to see more engagement with families, in one conversation, participants brought up that there can be a tension between schools' safety protocols, such as doing background checks on all parents who will be in the school building, and creating welcoming, parent-involved communities.

From both students and parents, we heard a general desire for teachers and school staff to be able to understand students' experiences and struggles. People expressed frustration at past misunderstandings and wish that districts would navigate religious or racial hatred in partnership with students and families. In particular, we heard about major conflicts that had happened around the violence in Gaza and families wished for "district and school leaders who understand the nuance of race, religion and hatred in schools." Several people told us about Palestinian flags being taken down. People wish that students' culture and beliefs would be protected and valued.

"Most important part is to have staff members who know how to deal with students who ODE is trying to serve. A life that a refugee or immigrant is in is completely different from DACA or international student - to distinguish type of student, type of struggle - so when a student comes with questions, they can pinpoint that this staff knows what I'm going through, can relate. It's more about the knowledge of the struggle than the identity." – Congolese community member

In addition to what people shared around communication between schools and parents, we also heard about challenges of communications between parents and their own students. Many people brought up the desire to ensure that students maintain connections to their home culture and language, and that they would like to see schools play a role in this. As students gain fluency in English and in navigating US society, it can create tension between students and their families. That tension and potential disconnection between youth and parents is amplified if parents are not familiar with how to navigate the US school system.

In particular, several people brought up concerns that their children would not be taught to uphold values of their culture or community, such as respecting elders. In a few conversations, people brought up concerns about how teachers' political opinions and topics related to sexuality, LGBTQ+ identities, and sex are addressed at school. In one conversation, people requested that teachers avoid sharing personal political opinions and would like

"When we talk with our own children, we feel like we need an interpreter." - Nepali parent

to be informed about upcoming sex education or sexuality-related content. Some people encouraged the state and districts to partner with communities so that families can better understand how these topics are taught in schools. A few parents wanted more support from school districts about how to talk with their children before and after these classes/events.

REPRESENTATION AND SUPPORTIVE STAFF

There is a significant desire for increased representation of immigrant and refugee families in school and district staff. This was brought up as a way to support families as well as to provide language and support for students. Several people voiced frustration that there are too few or no district staff who reflect the population of students they serve. People also brought up frustration that if there are liaisons, they may not be integrated into the school district well enough to understand how it works and be able to advocate effectively. A few people shared experiences of having a resettlement agency play that role of liaison, but the agency didn't have staff who shared the families' particular cultures, languages, and home countries to be able to effectively help them navigate the school system. One person voiced that the migrant education program in their community had funding to hire people but there was a perception that "there is no one," suggesting that for school districts seeking to hire new staff, there may be an initial challenge of building relationships with organizations or parents to let them know about these opportunities.

"More Asian teachers would make it more welcoming and easier for Asian students to reach out for help." – Southeast Asian high school student

"Language is a big barrier. No single person who speaks Mam at the school district - and it's a large population...why can't you hire someone from our own community?" – Comment from community conversation with Spanish and Mam speakers

Many people suggested that there is an opportunity to hire newcomer parents and address multiple needs simultaneously: addressing educational staff burnout, increasing numbers of staff who share students' cultures and language, creating income opportunities for newcomer adults, and helping parents learn to navigate the US school

system. A few people also particularly suggested that schools could help new immigrant parents get set up to offer childcare services at home or at the school in the evening.

“There is a win-win opportunity here to create opportunities for parents...schools are short staffed! Ukrainian, Afghan newcomers often speak English - this could be creating opportunity for parents to volunteer as a workforce project. Parents can get trained, lead to working in schools...so that there’s people at school who understand your culture that you can go work with.” - Person who works for an agency that serves immigrant and refugee communities statewide

TRANSITIONS

Transitions came up as a major theme across our conversations. In particular, people shared the particular challenges students face transitioning into kindergarten, into and out of high school, , and transitioning new students into the school system.

Several people pointed out particular challenges for high school and older students. One challenge that people mentioned is how high school students are expected to make choices in high school that will impact their future, including navigating applications for higher education or training programs, choosing extracurricular activities, and understanding how their choices relate to their desires for the future. Another person brought up that there can be significant barriers to getting documentation like diplomas from their home country, which can create a barrier to higher education. Ending student services at 18 can also be a significant barrier, since some youth who are a little older may arrive without formal education. One person also

brought up concerns that the GED is not available in other languages. We also heard concerns about schools guiding newcomer students away from enrolling in school and towards taking the GED in order to maintain the school's graduation rates.

There were also particular concerns that came up related to financing higher education. One person pointed out the disconnect that public education is free but higher education in the US is expensive and students and families need support to make decisions about debt. Several parents brought up concern and hope their students learn about financial management and how to navigate college decisions, and one person particularly brought up how refugees may be categorized as international students and ineligible for in-state tuition.

In one conversation, community college was highlighted as an opportunity to support students in accessing higher education. Several people brought up the Oregon Promise program, which helps cover tuition costs at any Oregon community college for recent high school graduates and GED test graduates.

Alongside conversations about higher education, several people also brought up that transitioning students into kindergarten is also challenging. They felt it was important for parents to receive resources in their own language, preferably communicated by someone from their own culture who speaks their language, including very basic information about how kindergarten works and what to expect. In one conversation, people also shared that transitioning students into kindergarten is

“It sounds simple if you were born here, you were here from kindergarten...you study, you understand everything. But for someone who is coming, they are stressed and they receive tons of information and they cannot process everything very smoothly. Do I need to go for afterschool activities? Volunteer? What kind of impact does it have on my future?” – Staff member at organization that serves Ukrainian community

*“The help we need we also need in college...it needs to be both in high school and college. I wouldn’t have been able to apply for colleges without Upward Bound and TRIO.”
- Rohingya community member*

particularly challenging for children who didn't go to preschool, and they suggested that Preschool for All is supportive.

Besides beginning and ending school, we heard from several people who work in organizations about the importance of transition programs for people transitioning into the school system. People spoke about and differentiated among waves of immigration, each with distinct historical and political contexts that people are arriving from. Some people talked about districts being “proactive” vs “reactive” and suggested that creating programs specifically focused on transitioning new immigrants into their new environment, while they are also sorting out their basic needs, would be helpful. One person suggested that considering how services being offered, such as dental screenings or immunizations, fit in with the priorities and concerns of families who are just arriving and settling in a new place would be helpful.

“When they came, there was no plan...the district wasn't ready. They were just put in the general classroom, had to learn to adapt. No transitional time. Many kids came from messy, gang violence, drugs. Some were detained for months – that trauma wasn't addressed when they came.” – Person who works at organization that serves immigrant and refugee community in Lincoln County

FOOD

One challenge that was consistently brought up is access to food that students are familiar with and meets students' dietary restrictions. In particular, several people mentioned that the food that Oregon schools provide does not meet the dietary needs of Muslim students because it is not halal (butchered in the proper way),

“I was the kid who did not eat anything...because I was the only Asian in the Oregon City high school when I came to the US. I didn't know what to eat. I didn't bring lunch.” - Vietnamese community member

and so students frequently miss both breakfast and lunch. People would like to see schools be aware of students' dietary needs and provide options that meet them, including Halal options and providing more detailed information about food that contains gelatin and pork, particularly because many students are on the free/reduced lunch programs. For example, a participant shared a positive story that their organization worked with the cafeteria staff at a Salem school to arrange for rice and beans to be available to students every day. Another person shared a story about a group of Japanese moms who started bringing yakisoba and then their school adopted it as part of their regular meal service, and later added a Japanese curry lunch. She commented that "it's good if it starts from the parents."

We also heard concerns from parents about their children not wanting to eat the foods their parents had packed for them because of other students' perceptions that the foods smelled bad or looked strange or different. Several people suggested having alternative places for students to go during lunch, such as more private places to eat, opportunities to eat lunch with people who share the same cultural background, and to have cafeterias serve culturally specific and traditional foods such as bao or caldo de res so that students remain connected to their roots and can share their culture with their friends.

"Food plays a significant role in maintaining cultural identity, especially for those living far from their home countries. Preparing and enjoying traditional dishes allowed participants to remain connected to their roots while passing these customs on to the next generation. One participant, a mother from Guatemala, described how she made caldo de res for her children and mentioned that since they moved from Guatemala, the dish allowed her to share the tastes and memories of her homeland with them." – Comment from community conversation with Spanish and Mam speakers

UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

In addition to the common themes, values and hopes above, we heard some perspectives that came up less frequently or a small number of people raised. These include:

- People who work at organizations supporting immigrant and refugee families shared that strict eligibility requirements are often a barrier to prioritizing services based on need or vulnerability. For instance, a few people who work at organizations talked about being required to prioritize Ukrainian and Afghan immigrants and not being able to serve Spanish-speaking community members, even if the school district is asking them to, because the funding comes from federal sources that have specific criteria for different immigrant populations. They would like to see funding opportunities through the Immigrant and Refugee Students Success Plan be open to all nationalities of origin and categories of immigrants. They were also concerned that age cutoffs make it harder to effectively serve older youth. A few people wondered about how flexible the Immigrant Student Success Plan funding would be, particularly if the funding comes from federal sources.
- Disciplinary incidents came up just a few times. One parent shared that he wants to make sure that this goal includes recognition of what students are doing well to help the child improve and decrease disciplinary incidents in the future. In another conversation, a participant pointed out that there is a disconnect for students who may have had a much higher level of independence and responsibility in another context and are being asked to raise their hand to use the bathroom at school. The participant suggested that this kind of disconnect might be the root cause of disciplinary incidents.
- Supporting students with learning disabilities came up infrequently. One participant brought up that it is challenging for schools to identify learning disabilities such as dyslexia when there is a language and education difference.
- Several people brought up the positive impact of school-based health clinics in serving immigrant and refugee students and families.

- In one conversation, a participant brought up the opportunity of multilingual facilitated, intercultural spaces to connect newcomers and English-speaking families around shared interests or topics.
- A few people shared concerns about required music and dance classes they felt were not appropriate at school and wished there were alternatives. They also expressed a desire that Halloween, Christmas, and other religious events would not be enforced, or that students would have the option to opt out.
- A few people shared concerns about financial transparency and funding, including wishing that funds could be inclusive of all types of cultural events.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

In addition to providing ODE with information about people’s values and beliefs in regards to how schools can better support immigrant and refugee students through the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan, this engagement process also provided some insights into how ODE might continue to engage people in the future, including the following:

- Providing all materials, including engagement opportunities, in multiple languages;
- Working with trusted partners like community organizations and resettlement agencies; and
- Supporting districts in engaging with their local communities.

There is a high demand for schools to partner with families and a significant opportunity to engage with immigrant and refugee parents as both volunteers and staff, meeting the need for cultural liaisons, navigators, and/or district staff who reflect the populations they serve. Many of the suggestions people had are things that ODE can’t implement, so we encourage ODE to share these insights with school districts. The responses also provide ODE with particular areas to more deeply explore. People are

eager to be in conversation with decision-makers and with their own school districts about the needs and well-being of immigrant and refugee students in Oregon. In addition, we encourage ODE to communicate updates and tangible outcomes with participants in this engagement and OKT is happy to support them in their efforts to communicate back to families and organizations.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

“Parents want their children’s educational experiences to be inclusive, empowering, and enriching in terms of academic knowledge and developing the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to progress. This vision calls for schools to be more than places of learning—they must also be places of healing, inclusion, and opportunity.” – Person who works at organization that serves immigrant and refugee communities in Lincoln County

People were excited to participate in these conversations and felt that this is a particularly important time for Oregon to take steps to support immigrant and refugee students and families. Across several conversations, people voiced concerns about how the national political landscape and anticipated changes in the federal administration would impact both funding to support immigrant and refugee families as well as families' fears around identifying as immigrants and refugees and willingness to seek support and resources. People mentioned they are trying to put in place contingency plans to try to keep providing services as much as possible despite uncertainties. A couple of people mentioned that they hope Oregon remains true to its values as a state. As one person said, "I know we live in a state that understands that newcomers are important and valuable members of our communities, and we want to support them and make them feel welcome."

People shared their hope that this input will be heard and used to create tangible change that will positively benefit students. In many conversations, there was palpable excitement about a vision of schools that respect immigrants’ cultures, provide

multilingual support, and actively engage with families to create a collaborative and supportive environment. In other conversations, people were hopeful that focusing on mental and behavioral health, well-being, and approaches to reducing isolation will lead to addressing multiple goals in the plan. Parents want their children to be loved, heard, accepted, and encouraged. Several people shared the conviction that creating more welcoming school environments for immigrant and refugee students will have significant, meaningful benefits for all students in Oregon.

“This is really an investment in our future. Getting kids educated shapes what the community will look like in 10 years.” – Person who works at an agency that serves immigrant and refugee communities

ADDITIONAL CONTENT: APPENDICES

- A. Description of Project Design and Outreach
- B. Interview protocol for community connector interviews
- C. Kitchen Table Conversation Guide for leading community conversations
- D. Flyer for OKT-led community conversations on Zoom
- E. Slides used in Zoom community conversations

Appendix A. Description of Project Design & Outreach

Oregon’s Kitchen Table focused on engagement with immigrant and refugee students and families and community organizations that may be harder to reach and/or weren’t already represented in ODE’s other advisory councils and task forces. In parallel to this effort, ODE led community engagement with district staff and Educational Service Districts (ESDs)s, which included creating a task force. In order to reach both a wide variety of students, families and people who work at community-based organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities, OKT designed a set of community engagement activities in October and November 2024. In order to reach both a wide variety of students, families, and people who work at community-based organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities, OKT designed a set of community engagement activities. These included:

- Individual interviews;
- Culturally specific community events and community conversations led by community organizers and partners to gather input from families in their communities; and
- A series of 3 Zoom conversations, in English with interpretation available by request, with community organizations, entities, and groups who serve immigrant and refugee families.

OKT also offered a Kitchen Table Guide (*Appendix C. Kitchen Table Conversation Guide*) for community groups to use in holding their own conversations. OKT, ODE, and community organizers conducted outreach by circulating flyers, social

media, emails, and group messaging platforms. Community organizers also connected with people through phone calls, text messages, and in-person outreach. OKT also reached out through our newsletter, presenting at standing ODHS meetings of community organizations, and by reaching out through the Immigrant + Refugee Funder Collaborative and Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement.

The three community conversations were designed as opportunities for people who work at organizations to share their experience and input. Interpretation was available by request for all conversations, and they were all held on Zoom so that people from different parts of the state could participate. The design for the conversations is attached as *Appendix C. Kitchen Table Conversation Guide*.

CONTENT FOR ENGAGEMENT

Because this engagement was intended for a wide range of people, it assumed that people bring different levels of knowledge and experience. It was our goal to make sure that people could share what they believe and have experienced.

We developed questions for interviews and community conversations that fell into several general themes:

- What a welcoming school environment looks and feels like
- What student success means
- What people see as the highest priority among ODE's goals for the Immigrant + Refugee Student Success Plan
- What they see is working and where there are gaps or opportunities for improvement

Throughout engagement activities, we did not ask people explicitly to share any personal information, but people shared their own stories and volunteered information about their countries of origin, immigration status, first language, and where they live now.

PARTICIPATION

Throughout this project and this report, we are committed to providing information about participation in ways that protect individual's anonymity, so we have omitted details that could be personally revealing.³ Here are some highlights regarding participation:

- Over 450 people participated across the different forms of engagement.
- At the start of the planning for engagement, OKT conducted 9 individual or small group interviews with 13 people.
- OKT hosted 3 conversations on Zoom.
- 9 culturally specific community conversations organized by OKT organizers (one with Nepali families, one with Southeast Asian youth, one with Spanish and Mam speakers, two with Muslim communities, one with Ukrainian youth and one with their parents, one with Chinese parents, and one with Vietnamese parents). Over 250 people participated across these conversations.
- OKT joined three standing meetings of organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities to share about the community engagement process, invite people to be involved, and lead short conversations about perceptions of student success.
- People who participated identified themselves as living in or serving people in Multnomah, Washington, Lincoln, Deschutes, Marion, and Clackamas counties. Some people said they serve communities across the state.
- Conversations were led in Mam, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Arabic, Nepali and English.
- Participants self-identified in the various following ways, including by country of origin, language, and/or ethnic group:
 - Lao, Hmong, African, Filipino, Indian, Lu Mien, Chinese, Mexican-American, Rohingya;

³ For more information about OKT's commitment to protecting peoples' personal information when they participate in community engagement processes, visit our website: <https://www.oregonskitchentable.org/about/faqs>.

- Indigenous⁴ to North or South America;
- Spanish, Chuukese, Popti, Mam, and Somali speakers,
- and/or from these countries: Algeria, Bangladesh, Burma, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Micronesia, Morocco, Nepal, Palestine, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Yemen;
- Permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolee, recent immigrants, first-generation descendants of immigrants, and people with temporary protected status.
- Several people identified as white.
- Parents of children ranging in age from 0 to 18, including some students who are enrolled in dual language immersion programs. Some people also mentioned that they have children over 18 years of age.
- Students who participated ranged in age from 8 to 18 and included middle school and high school students. We also heard from a few university students and recent university graduates.

Due to the limited timeline and the number of different immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon, we know we were not able to reach everyone. In particular, this engagement process has gaps in hearing the perspectives of people and communities in Eastern Oregon as well as more rural communities in general. We hope that in ODE's ongoing work on the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan, they can work to ensure that these communities are involved.

⁴ Throughout engagement activities, we did not ask people explicitly to share any personal information as activities often occurred in group conversation settings where people have different levels of comfort in sharing personal information. Many people did share their own stories and volunteered information about their countries of origin, immigration status, first language, and where they live now. When people share information about their identities, we use their own words as much as possible. As a result, there is some inconsistency in how people identified themselves, such as by country of origin vs. by ethnicity, as well as inconsistency in how much specificity people used to self-identify themselves. As a result, there is some ambiguity about what 'indigenous' meant to each individual who self-identified that way.

Appendix B. Interview protocol for community connector interviews



Immigrant Refugee Student Success Plan Community Engagement

About the project

In 2023, the Oregon State Legislature passed [Senate Bill 1532](#). It directs the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to develop and carry out a statewide plan for students who are immigrants and refugees.

The purpose of the plan is to help schools in Oregon meet the needs of immigrant and refugee students. In the past, immigrant and refugee students have not had the same chances as other students to succeed at school. The plan will include ways to improve the learning and experiences of immigrant and refugee students at school.

As part of the plan, ODE will form an advisory group. It will be made up of students, parents, teachers and staff who work with immigrant and refugee students. ODE will also give grants to organizations and school districts to help carry out the plan.

ODE is working with Oregon's Kitchen Table to hear from refugee and immigrant communities across Oregon. We would like to learn about what they would like to see in the plan. ODE wants to hear from youth and families that are immigrants and refugees. We also want to hear from community-based organizations serving these youth and families.

As we create opportunities for people to share what they want, OKT is conducting some initial interviews with people from different communities. We will be working with people to set up ways to hear from families and youth in their own communities. We will also be hosting three online Zoom conversations for organizations that work with immigrant and refugee students in late October/early November.

Questions about the Student Success Plan

1. What does a warm, welcoming school look like for immigrant or refugee families and students in your community?
 - a. What helps you and families in your community feel like you are part of your school community? Or that you belong?

2. When people in your community talk about students being successful at school, what are the ways they talk about that?
 - a. What is the definition of success for you and your family?
 - b. Please think about student success or schools in general. What is important to know about this in your culture? What is important to know about from the experiences of your community?
 - c. *For parents:* What do you expect your student gets from school?
 - d. *For students:* What do you expect to get from school?

3. What do you see that's already happening that works well to help students and families achieve the vision you / your community has of success?

4. The plan aims to offer ways to help support immigrant and refugee students in different areas. Below is a list of goals of the plan. Which one of these areas do you think is the most important for you and your community?
 - a. What do you see that is already happening that works well to achieve this goal?
 - b. What specific challenges or barriers do immigrant or refugee students face in achieving this goal? What are specific challenges or barriers to getting support to achieve this goal?
 - c. What kinds of tools, programs or resources would help to reach this goal?

Goals of the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan:

- Have parents and families be more involved in their child's school
- Support students to participate in educational activities before and after school hours.
- Help young children be ready to be in preschool and kindergarten
- Improve how well students can read, write and do math
- Help students when they are starting at a new school or moving from one school to another
- Help teachers teach in a way that uses students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives
- Increase attendance by making students feel welcomed and valued at school

- Increase the number of students who go to college, community college and career training programs
- Understand why immigrant and refugee students are disciplined more often than other students and decrease how often students are disciplined

Questions about community engagement

- Are there places or events where your community regularly gathers over the next month? Would people in your community welcome an opportunity at any of those events or places to share about what they would like to see in the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan?
- What needs are you aware of that members of your community might have in order to be able to participate in community conversations about this topic? (transportation, language preferences, supervised activities for children, food, setting, meeting set-up, materials, etc.)
- Who might be the best person or organization to invite you or members of your community to engage on this topic?
- Who else would you suggest we connect with about engaging community members in your community or who you serve who might be interested in this topic?



KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATION GUIDE

Immigrant & Refugee Student Success Plan



WWW.OREGONSKITCHENTABLE.ORG



This Guide is for people who are organizing and hosting a Kitchen Table Conversation with others about what you would like to see in the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan.

We hope this Guide provides helpful ideas for organizing a community conversation, a structure for what to talk about during the conversation, and a clear way to summarize what people shared and get it to OKT.

If you need support or assistance, please reach out! Email info@oregonskitchentable or call (503)725-3420.

CONTENTS

Our Approach

Gathering People

Purpose / Background

Guiding the conversation

Gathering input

Tips and templates

OUR APPROACH

Oregon's Kitchen Table strives to include all Oregonians in the decisions that affect their lives, with a particular focus on reaching, engaging, and hearing from Oregonians who have been left out of traditional public processes.

We work with organizers, translators, and interpreters so materials and online and in-person consultations are available for Oregonians who speak a wide variety of languages and learn in a variety of ways.

We recognize that people bring all different levels of knowledge and familiarity regarding issues / policies. We use approaches to ensure those who may not have as in-depth knowledge can still respond and share what they believe and have experienced. People participate in many different ways: through online and paper surveys, individual or small group interviews, culturally specific and community events, festivals, listening sessions, or public meetings open to anyone.

One of the approaches we use is what we call a Kitchen Table Conversation: a group of people gathering together to learn from each other and share what they think in the language, setting, and format that is most comfortable for them.



GATHERING PEOPLE TO TALK

INVITATION

Use whatever method people will pay attention to, but make sure it feels warm, welcoming, and inviting. It might be a text, a phone call, What'sApp, a social media post, or an email. Some people set up e-invites. Make clear the time, place, purpose, what to expect (food or participant incentive), and if they need to RSVP.

GROUP SIZE

10-12 people is a nice size. But larger groups can be broken up into smaller groups. And you can still have a good conversation with 2-3 people.

FORMAT

You can meet in person, over Zoom, or group chat (people have used WhatsApp before, for example). You can talk while planting trees or clearing out invasive species. You can have the conversation on a bus during a field trip. Hold the conversation in a space that is easy and comfortable for people in your community.



WELCOME COMING

HOST

Think of yourself as the host, welcoming people at your table,

FOOD

If you are in person, have food! Even a simple snack (popcorn, cookies, water, fruit) will help people feel welcome.

FUN

If you're in-person or virtual, have some element of fun and joy that makes sense for your group: music, a short game, decorations.

ACTIVITY

Have an opening activity that allows for all to say something at the beginning so that they can get comfortable. For example, you could invite everyone to share a favorite song, story, or book.



ROLES FOR CO-HOSTS

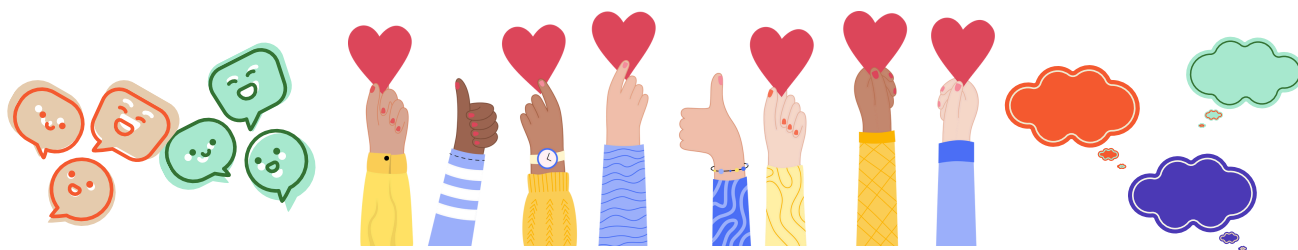
If you are working with a partner or a team to co-host a conversation, decide who will take which role. Here are some common roles. You could also invite participants to join you and take on one of these roles.



- Facilitator: Guides conversation, asks questions, and helps capture themes, commonalities, or differences.
- Notetaker: Captures what people say. Bullet points are fine! If the notetaker can get any good quotes, that's great but not required.
- Timekeeper: Use a clock (phone works!) to help make sure that there's enough time for each part of the conversation. Give facilitator / group time warnings.
- Reporter: If there are small group discussions, shares a summary of what the group discussed for the whole group.
- Observer: Helps the Facilitator make sure everyone gets a chance to talk or that no one person takes up too much time.

PURPOSE FOR GATHERING

Explain why you've invited people from community groups to gather together to talk about how families and communities support children develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Below is a description of what the decision is and why it matters. You can read this or summarize in your own words.



In 2023, the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1532, directing the Oregon Department of Education to develop and implement a statewide plan for students who are immigrants and refugees. The purpose of the plan is to address disparities in academic success, historical practices that have led to disparities, and the educational needs of immigrant and refugee students. The plan will include strategies to improve the learning and experience of immigrant and refugee students at school. As part of the plan, ODE will form an advisory group made up of students, parents, educators and education partners who work with immigrant and refugee students. ODE will also give grants to organizations and districts to implement the strategies in the plan.

ODE is working with Oregon's Kitchen Table to hear from a variety of refugee and immigrant communities across Oregon about what they would like to see in the plan. ODE wants to hear from youth and families that are immigrants and refugees as well as community-based organizations serving those youth and families.

GUIDING THE CONVERSATION

1. BACKGROUND

People have different experiences and knowledge about the topic. We honor all of those experiences and knowledge. Share the basic background provided in the "Purpose for Gathering" section.



2. QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

OKT has developed a few questions with the decision maker. We usually have a few main questions to ask people. We also have follow up questions if people need some direction in responding or if there's extra time.

3. HOW TO SPEND YOUR TIME TOGETHER

It's ok if people want to spend time on just one or two questions. We want to know where their interests and energies are, so that's fine!



4. CONFIDENTIALITY

Let people know that their names or anything that identifies them won't be shared. You will give OKT a summary of what you all talked about. OKT will combine all the input from different conversations, surveys, and other ways people share what they think.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

What does a warm, welcoming school environment look like for immigrant and / or refugee families and students in your community?

Follow up (if people need prompting or there's time): What helps you and families in your community feel like they are part of or belong to your school community?

When people in your community talk about student success, what are the ways they talk about that?

Follow up (if people need prompting or there's time): What is important to know about in your culture and/or from experiences in your community regarding student success or schools in general?

The plan aims to offer strategies to help support students in different areas. Looking at these areas - which one do you think is the highest priority for you / your community?

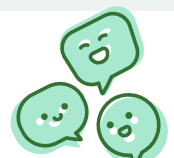
Goals of the Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan:

- Increase parent and family engagement
- Support students to participate in educational activities before and after school hours
- Early childhood education and kindergarten readiness
- Improve literacy and numeracy levels
- Transitions throughout school years / grades
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Increase attendance by creating affirming and welcoming environments
- Increase attendance in post-secondary programs like college and career training programs
- Address disproportionate rate of disciplinary incidents

What do you see that's already happening that works well to achieve this goal?

What specific challenges or barriers do immigrant/refugee students face that impact their education and well-being? Are there any barriers that prevent students from accessing current support services, such as language or transportation?

What kinds of tools, programs or resources would be supportive to reaching this goal?



CONNECTING BACK

Let people know where their input will go and how it will be used. You can use the timeline on the next page. Also let them know that you will connect with Oregon's Kitchen Table with whatever questions came up and circle back to people with any answers.

INVITING MORE VOICES

Share information about ways that people can invite others they know to share what they think. Use the flyers with the link and QR code included after the summary templates.

APPRECIATIONS

Let people know how important their input is and we appreciate hearing their ideas, thoughts, experiences and time on this important issue. You can invite everyone to share their appreciations for each other.

ACTIVITY

If there's time, you can invite people to share aloud. If there's not time, have post-it notes or cards for people to write or draw their response to a closing question: One example: **“What is one hope or wish you have for immigrant and refugee families or students in school?”**



CLOSING

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

1. INVITE OTHERS TO PARTICIPATE!

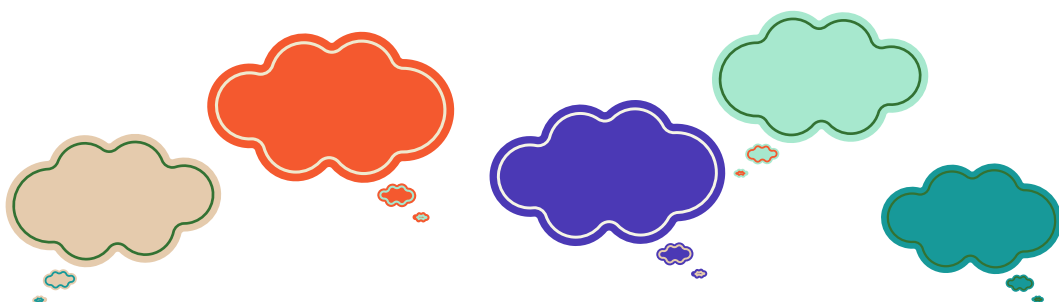
We are hosting three community conversations on Zoom for people who work at organizations or groups that support immigrant and refugee communities. People can also organize Kitchen Table Conversations in their own communities. For more information visit our website: <https://www.oregonskitchentable.org/immigrant-refugee-student-success>

2. OKT REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

OKT will provide a report of what we heard to ODE. We will post the report and a summary of that report in 10 languages on the OKT website. We will also share it with anyone who gave us their contact information.

3. HOW ODE WILL USE THE INPUT

Your input will help ODE create the interim Immigrant and Refugee Student Success Plan. ODE will also be creating an advisory group will give grants to organizations and districts to implement the strategies in the plan.



TIPS FOR SUMMARY

- ~ Bullet points are fine! This is a summary not a formal report.
- ~ Let us know any areas where there is agreement or disagreement in people's perspectives.
- ~ Let us know if there are any unique perspectives (an idea / experience / belief one person shared even if others didn't have it).
- ~ Add your observations/reflections: Feelings, sense of issues, concerns, positive experiences.
- ~ Let us know if there's anyone we ought to follow up with on any ideas they shared.
- ~ Share any questions about the project that you couldn't answer and who to follow up with.
- ~ Include any pictures from the conversation. Make sure to ask permission first!





SUMMARY TEMPLATE

Date / Place:

of people:

General description of the group (age ranges, languages spoken, any ways the group might identify themselves):

Opening activity (what you did, anything anyone shared):

What does a warm, welcoming school environment look like for immigrant and / or refugee families and students in your community?



SUMMARY TEMPLATE

When people in your community talk about student success, what are the ways they talk about that?

What is important to know about in your culture and/or from experiences in your community regarding student success or schools in general?

Which of these goals do you think is the highest priority for you / your community?



SUMMARY TEMPLATE

What do you see that's already happening that works well to achieve this goal?

What specific challenges or barriers do immigrant/refugee students face that impact their education and well-being? Are there any barriers that prevent students from accessing current support services, such as language or transportation?

Closing activity (what you did, what people shared)



SUMMARY TEMPLATE

Areas of agreement among the group

Areas of disagreement among the group

Unique perspectives



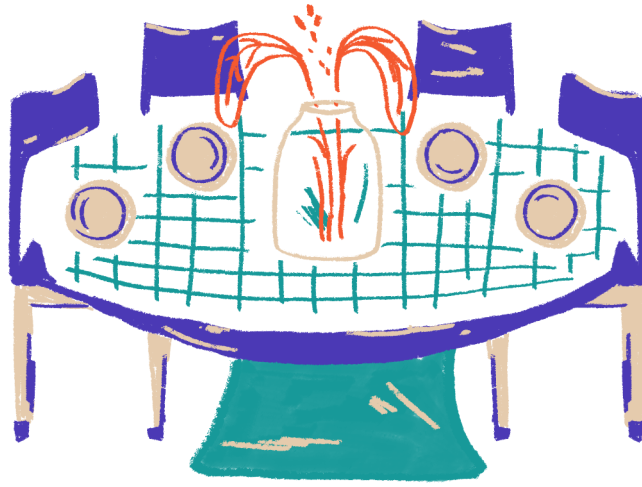
SUMMARY TEMPLATE

Areas where someone was persuaded by someone else's point of view

Any observations you had

Quotes

SEND YOUR SUMMARY BY NOVEMBER 15 TO FEEN@PDX.EDU



QUESTIONS?
IDEAS?
NEED SUPPORT?
CONTACT US!



503-725-3420



INFO@OREGONSKITCHENTABLE.ORG



WWW.OREGONSKITCHENTABLE.ORG



**Do you work with immigrant and refugee students and families in Oregon?
Join us for a Zoom conversation!**

The Oregon Department of Education is creating a statewide plan to support immigrant and refugee students to be successful in school.

Your ideas and experiences are important!

Wednesday, October 30, 9 - 10:30am

Register: tinyurl.com/ODE-irsuccess-oct30

Monday, November 18, 12 - 1:30pm

Register: tinyurl.com/ODE-irsuccess-nov18

Tuesday, November 19, 9 - 10:30am

Register: tinyurl.com/ODE-irsuccess-nov19

Interpretation is available - please let us know in advance.
We will do our best to make arrangements.



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

Appendix E. Slides used in Zoom community conversations



Welcome!

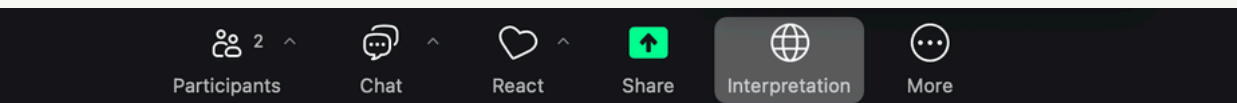
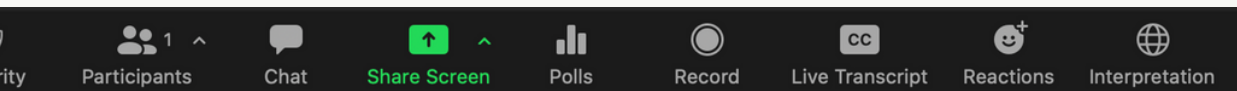
Please share in the chat:

- Name
- Your organization or group
- Where are you located in Oregon?

Today we have interpretation so please choose the language you speak.

For English: Click on the "Interpretation" Globe and click "English"

For Somali: Click on the "Interpretation" Globe and click "French"





Eliot + Sarah





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.

Today's Conversation

Discussion
Guidelines,
Background

Discussion:
Full group +
breakouts

Next Steps,
Closing

Background

In 2023, the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1532, directing the Oregon Department of Education to develop and implement a statewide plan that will support students who are immigrants and refugees succeed in school.

Now, ODE wants to hear from youth and families that are immigrants and refugees as well as community-based organizations serving those youth and families to inform the strategies that should be included in the plan.



Discussion Guidelines

Give time and space
for each other

Speak from your
own experiences
and observations.
Don't rely on
generalizations.

Be respectful of
your neighbors

Listen with
curiosity

Make room for
different ideas and
experiences



INTRODUCTIONS: YOUR TURN!



Think of a time you felt welcome at a gathering or event.
What was 1 thing that helped you feel welcome?



LET'S DISCUSS!



What does a warm, welcoming school look like for immigrant or refugee families and students in your community?

Drop into the chat or share out loud!



The plan aims to offer ways to help support immigrant and refugee students in different areas.

- Have parents and families be more involved in their child's school
- Support students to participate in educational activities before and after school hours.
- Help young children be ready to be in preschool and kindergarten
- Improve how well students can read, write and do math
- Help students when they are starting at a new school or moving from one school to another
- Help teachers teach in a way that uses students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives
- Increase attendance by making students feel welcomed and valued at school
- Increase the number of students who go to college, community college and career training programs
- Understand why immigrant and refugee students are disciplined more often than other students and decrease how often students are disciplined



The plan aims to offer ways to help support immigrant and refugee students in different areas.

1. Which one of these areas do you think is the most important for you and your community?
2. What do you see that is already happening that works well to achieve this goal?
3. What specific challenges or barriers do immigrant or refugee students and families face in achieving this goal?
4. What kinds of tools, programs or resources would help to reach this goal?



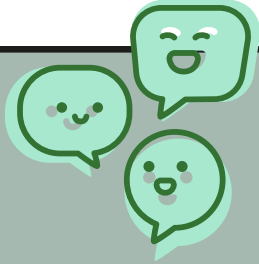
LET'S DISCUSS!



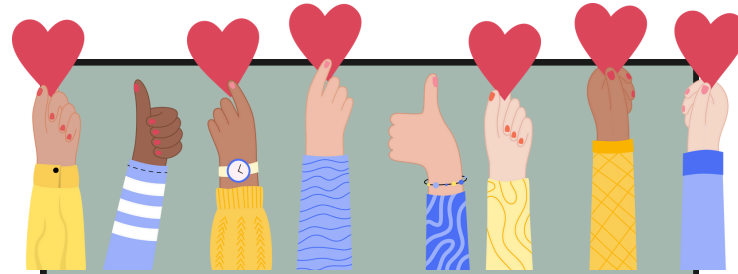
When people in your community talk about students being successful at school, what are the ways they talk about that?

Drop into the chat or share out loud!

Next Steps



Final community
conversation on
November 19



The input will
inform the ODE
Immigrant and
Refugee Student
Success Plan



Summary in up to
10 languages -
shared with ODE
and participants



Thank you!

As we wrap up, share with us by chat:

What is one hope or wish you have for immigrant and refugee students in school?

Eliot Feenstra - feen@pdx.edu