Community Input on Oregon's New Education Workforce Survey

Report from Oregon's Kitchen Table

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increased focus on the workers that serve Oregon schools and students. Particularly since the pandemic, there has been widespread media coverage related to the difficulties of working in public education, and there have been a number of ideas proposed to help schools and districts recruit and retain a healthy and effective workforce. To that end, the 2023 Legislature enacted Senate Bill 283 to better understand and support Oregon's education workforce. One of the provisions of that bill requires that the Oregon Department of Education develop and administer an annual statewide workforce survey.

This summer and fall, ODE partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) to hear from a wide range of school and district staff members in different parts of the state about how the survey could be most accessible and helpful to people working in Oregon schools and districts. Approximately 200 people participated in the different engagement activities. While this engagement process is not a comprehensive representation of the state's very large and diverse education workforce, it provides a range of perspectives, experiences, and hopes for ODE to consider in developing first a pilot survey and subsequent years' surveys.

Throughout this process, we met experienced and passionate school and district staff members from across the state who serve in a variety of capacities. As you will read in more detail below, we heard varying levels of trust and confidence in how the survey will be implemented to encourage participation and ensure anonymity, as well as in how decision makers and the broader community will interpret and use the results. There is a widespread desire for decision makers to acknowledge the experiences and ideas that people share through the survey and to demonstrate how those ideas then impact decisions. There is also significant interest in using the survey to drive systemic – rather than individual school or district – level improvements for education workforce recruitment and retention.

This community engagement process and the pilot survey in 2025 offer opportunities for ODE to acknowledge people's input and demonstrate how that

input impacts both decisions and actions.

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

- Summary of community engagement process
- General observations about cross-cutting themes
- Barriers and challenges to participation
- Ways to encourage participation
- Content expectations
- Hopes for outcomes from the survey
- Recommendations for future community engagement
- Conclusion
- Appendices with conversation materials and process details

The purpose of the report is to give a snapshot of where values, hopes, and ideas overlap and where they diverge. It lays out themes and points out tensions. It also suggests places where more information and engagement might be helpful.

This report is not a scientific study, nor a presentation of the facts about issues facing the education workforce, but rather a recounting of a series of community conversations over a particular period of time. It does not offer a comprehensive list of every comment shared. In the report, we do include a selection of quotes or comments we heard in different engagement activities. 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 and other education leadership across the state to help – alongside other information, experiences, and ideas – in making decisions about a pilot statewide workforce experiences survey in 2025 and, ultimately, to improve the experience of Oregon educational workers and the students they serve.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spring 2024, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) to conduct a community engagement process to hear from a cross-section of Oregon's education workforce about how the new statewide education workforce experiences survey[1] could be most accessible and helpful. OKT designed and hosted community conversations in partnership with ODE and a number of statewide education associations to hear from people in different roles.

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

Participation

OKT heard from approximately 200 people in a variety of settings. Approximately 125 people participated in the 8 conversations (2 in-person and 6 via Zoom), which ranged from 5 attendees to 50 attendees. In addition, 7 people submitted input via writing through an online form and 7 people participated in individual interviews. OKT also presented to or spoke with approximately 60 people through 2 events. Participants live in a variety of counties across the state, and they work both in large, more populous districts and in smaller, less populous districts.

Findings: Commonly Held Values and Beliefs

Across the community conversations, events, and individual interviews, the following commonly held values and beliefs emerged:

- It is very important that the pilot survey and the ones that follow protect workers' anonymity and privacy.
- People's time is important. Carving out time for people to complete the survey during working hours will be helpful. Recognizing and acknowledging the

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[1] The 2023 Legislature enacted Senate Bill 283 to better understand and support Oregon's education workforce. One of the provisions of that bill requires an annual statewide workforce survey.

time and energy people put into sharing their working experiences is important.

- It is essential for decision makers – from the school or district level to ODE and the legislature – to acknowledge both *what* people share about their working experiences and *how* that input impacts any decisions made by the district or the state.
- Overall, people are thinking about education workforce experiences on a systemic or broad level rather than on a personal or at the individual school level.
- There is concern about how the results of the statewide survey will be interpreted and used. This concern was raised by participants serving in a wide variety of roles across the education system, from school administrators to licensed educators to classified staff members.

Findings: Areas of Differences or Tension

There are a few areas where people held different values and beliefs or where people noted that there are tradeoffs to be considered. While people do place a high value on anonymity and privacy, they also want to see flexibility in the formats people will be able to use to take the survey and to be able to identify distinctions by region and/or role in order to most effectively address recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in places and with positions that are hard to fill. And, while many people caution about survey fatigue, staff members in roles who have never been asked on a statewide level about their working experiences are excited for the opportunity to provide input.

Recommendations for Future Engagement

As ODE develops and conducts a pilot survey in 2025, we recommend that ODE staff seek input from the workers themselves. Community engagement connected to the pilot could include one or more of the following:

- Input on how survey content is framed;

- Developing an outreach and organizing strategy to communicate about the survey and drive participation; and/or
- Feedback about both content and outreach after the pilot survey is complete.

In addition, based on people's strong desire to understand how decision makers are using survey results, we encourage ODE to focus on communicating with participants following this engagement process, as well as with respondents to future surveys. It will be important to thank people for their time and input, let people know what issues and ideas the survey results surface, and how survey results are – or are not – leading to decisions and actions.

In order to make the results transparent and actionable, ODE should consider creating a panel or focus groups made up of a cross-section of the education workforce to review the results, help ODE make sense of it, and to review or suggest recommendations related to workforce issues as well as future surveys.

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

In 2023 the state legislature passed Senate Bill 283. This bill came out of discussions about high levels of staff vacancy and turnover in Oregon schools in recent years. Section 4 of SB 283 directed the Oregon Department of Education to conduct an annual survey of the state's education workforce to help understand staff experiences and how districts and the state can promote recruitment and retention of education staff.

As ODE began to develop standards for the new survey, ODE partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) to hear from education staff members in different roles about how the new statewide survey could be most accessible, useful, and effective for them. In spring 2024, OKT conducted a series of community conversations and interviews to hear from education workers across Oregon districts and schools. Because the new statewide survey would include all types of school and district staff, ODE was particularly interested in hearing from groups of staff who the state had previously not surveyed about their working experiences.[2]

ODE will use the input from this community engagement process to draft survey standards to present to the State Board of Education in fall 2024. Once the State Board of Education approves standards, then ODE will create the survey and plans to administer a pilot survey in 2025.

Engagement Goals

The goals for the community engagement process were multifold:

1. To hear from a variety of people in different roles within districts or schools, particularly those who the state has not surveyed about their working experiences before;

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[2] Oregon had previously surveyed licensed educators about their experiences through the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey periodically in the past decade.

2. To hear about the barriers and challenges school and district staff might face in responding to a survey about their working experiences;
3. To hear about what might help encourage or incentivize people to participate in the survey; and
4. To hear about people's hopes for potential outcomes of the workforce survey.

Outreach and Engagement Activities

From May to August 2024, OKT conducted a series of interviews and community conversations to gather input from Oregon school staff members in different roles and parts of the state. The engagement activities focused on what might make it hard for people to participate in the survey and what might make it more likely that people would participate. In addition, OKT also asked people to consider what topics they think the survey should cover. Finally, people were also invited to share what outcomes they would like to see as a result of the survey. The agenda and questions posed to participants in community conversations and interviews are included as "Appendix A. Materials for Community Conversations."

Throughout the different conversations and interviews, many people shared feelings of relief about a statewide survey that will include all staff in Oregon schools. We heard this particularly from staff members whose roles had not previously been included in statewide efforts. People in roles who have been asked about their work experiences before also acknowledged that it is important to hear from the wide variety of roles and staff members in schools and districts.
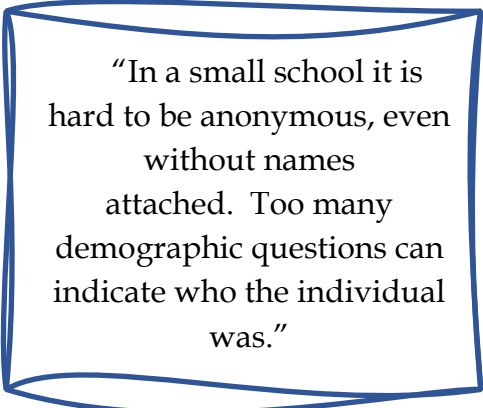
More details about the outreach and participation, including limitations, are included as "Appendix B. Community Engagement Process."

SECTION 2: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

A few themes came up repeatedly across roles and geography during the outreach and engagement process. These themes are discussed in more detail in later sections; however, given how prevalent they were in our discussions, we raise them here to highlight their significance.

Anonymity

Across the different conversations and interviews, we heard loudly, clearly, and repeatedly about the importance of anonymity in order for people to feel comfortable sharing their work experiences. While this was a common concern for people in different settings, those who work in small districts and schools particularly emphasized that ensuring anonymity was a top priority for them. Several people also shared that even if the survey included a note about anonymity, they thought that there would still be a high level of concern amongst their colleagues that it was in fact truly anonymous.

> "In a small school it is hard to be anonymous, even without names attached. Too many demographic questions can indicate who the individual was."

When we asked how people would like the results to be presented and shared, people generally said they'd like to see it aggravated at a regional level in order to help ensure anonymity. Several people also said they wanted to see results provided based on roles so they could understand how to approach recruitment and retention around particularly hard-to-fill positions. At the same time, because some roles are highly specialized or rare in some districts, this could jeopardize anonymity. People generally felt like sharing results on a school building level – and in some cases, at a district level - would compromise anonymity.

People's Time Matters

In talking about both barriers and incentives, staff time came up as both a potential barrier as well as a potential incentive for participation; in fact, we noticed that many

people placed a higher value on time considerations over other factors such as survey platform accessibility. Many people shared concerns that staff members would not have time during their work day to fit in responding to a survey, particularly if the survey took more than 5 – 10 minutes to complete. In addition, several administrative staff members wondered how they might be able to provide staffing to cover the time classroom educators might need to respond to a survey during working hours. Nonetheless, nearly everyone said they thought staff should be provided time during the work day to respond to the survey.

Several people suggested that focusing on time in some way might serve as an encouragement or incentive for participation. We heard suggestions about carving out time in staff meetings for people to respond to the survey, for example. A couple of people thought offering time off work in some way for people who did respond to the survey would be a strong incentive to participate.

> "If it's too long time may be an issue."

Acknowledge Input and Show how Input Impacts Decisions

One other topic that came up in almost every discussion and interview was the need for decision makers – from superintendents to ODE and the legislature – to acknowledge what people share about their working experiences and how that input impacts any decisions made about working experiences and workforce recruitment and retention.

Throughout all of our conversations, people shared how important it is to them to see staff input recognized. Many people said that knowing their input would be considered and that the input would lead to some tangible action would be enough to encourage them and others to participate. Several people said that even if their own concerns weren't the ones addressed, they would feel good about the survey if it could be demonstrated that the concerns of some people were addressed.

Concerns about What Survey Input Will Lead to

> "We could do a better job by making people understand, 'We got you, we understood, but we just didn't go your way.'"

Relatedly, many people had questions about how ODE intended to share the results of the statewide

survey, as well as how the results would be used. These questions came up no matter the role of the participant. We often heard concerns about whether people might face repercussions in their workplace or in the broader community. We also heard in a couple of conversations apprehension that results could lead to additional state mandates or legislative action that would be burdensome for schools or not address the specifics of workforce recruitment and retention in their region.

There is strong interest in being able to see results, particularly by role and region, in order to focus recruitment and retention on particularly hard to fill roles and in particular parts of the state. There was less concern about seeing results on a school building level, particularly in order to preserve anonymity. A few people noted that they would like to have transparency and that it was important for the broader community to see results.

Desire to See Systemic v. Individualized Outcomes

While people did share their own individual circumstances or experiences to illustrate their thoughts about the statewide survey, we noticed that many workers are thinking more broadly about the new statewide survey. This was especially evident when we asked people about what they hoped might come out of the survey. People rarely – if at all – talked about an impact on their own individual position or experience; instead, they spoke about what they hoped to see for their school, district, community, or people broadly in their type of role or position. School psychologists hoped to see school psychologist positions filled in parts of the state where districts struggle to fill them. District administrators talked about wanting to see a workforce lens applied to new education legislation of all kinds. We heard people in different roles talk about hoping that the survey could create a better understanding in their broader communities about what working in a school or a district entails.

General Observations

In addition to the above cross-cutting concerns, the following additional themes emerged:

- Most people were not aware of the new statewide education workforce experiences survey;

- When they learned about it, many people shared a sense of relief that the state is undertaking a comprehensive survey that includes all staff in all Oregon schools. We heard this particularly from people whose roles had not previously been included in statewide efforts to hear from licensed educators. People in roles who have been asked about their work experiences before also acknowledged that it is important to hear from staff members across the education workforce.

> "I am glad they are focusing on all the district personnel. Everybody plays an important role in the students' education."

- People want to see their and their colleagues' work and roles valued and appreciated.
- People are often juggling multiple roles and responsibilities in their schools or districts. We heard that many people feel stretched and overloaded in their work. This also impacts how people feel they would approach a survey about workforce experiences; and
- High among people's concerns are anonymity and reassurance that their input is valued and will influence decisions and actions.

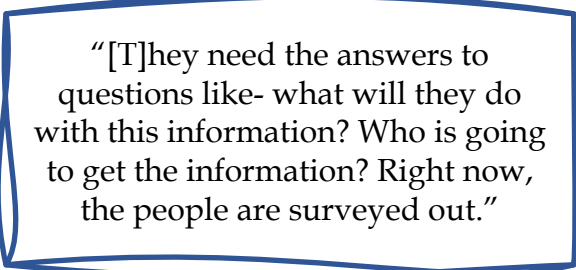## SECTION 3: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

While a few people in the conversations and interviews said they do not foresee any barriers to their own participation in the survey, most participants identified barriers or challenges that some people would likely face. In addition to the issue of time, those barriers and challenges fall within four general categories: survey fatigue, accessibility, communications, and how results are used.

Survey Fatigue

"Survey fatigue" came up frequently in conversations. We heard about "survey fatigue" in two particular ways:

1. People simply receive too many requests to fill out surveys and don't have the time or energy to respond; and
2. People are tired of responding to surveys and then seeing no action or hearing no response.

At the same time, people who have not been asked about their work experience indicated that this particular survey's inclusivity would help in overcoming survey fatigue. People emphasized the need to make sure all communications about the survey – and the content itself – clearly indicate who the survey is *for*, naming particular roles, and what decision makers intend to do with the results. They also offered suggestions (included in this report) for how to encourage people to participate and make the survey as easy as possible to access.
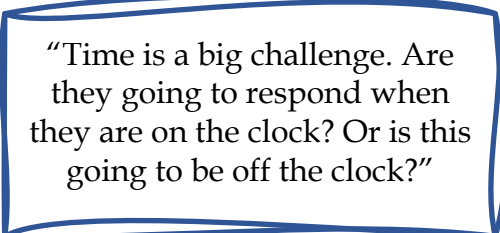
"[T]hey need the answers to questions like- what will they do with this information? Who is going to get the information? Right now, the people are surveyed out."

People who are already administering a survey with similar content and topics were curious about whether they might be able to utilize their current instrument and provide results to ODE. A few people noted one instrument in particular–*Upbeat*– that covers similar topics related to working experiences. In our conversation with district human resources staff members, about twenty percent of participants said they either used Upbeat or another survey tool to collect information about working experiences. We also heard from several of the employee associations and from Regional Education Networks that they administer similar surveys to their members or have in the past. People shared concerns that in their districts, people would ignore or dismiss a new state survey on the same topics since they have already responded to something on the same topics. It is not clear, however, how widespread the use of similar tools is, how regularly those surveys are administered, or how well the content or topics of existing instruments would align with the statewide survey. One person said they would like to see the state align or prioritize which surveys should continue,

and reduce rather than add to the number of surveys administered to school and district staff.

Accessibility

Several of the barriers or challenges that participants discussed relate to accessibility. As mentioned above in Section 2, people often cited carving out time during the work day – particularly if the survey takes longer than 10 minutes or even 5 minutes for many people to complete – as a barrier. Several people also mentioned internet or computer access would likely serve as a barrier, either for themselves or for

> "Time is a big challenge. Are they going to respond when they are on the clock? Or is this going to be off the clock?"

people they work with. In one conversation, a bus driver noted that their district provides bus drivers with walkie talkies but not computers, tablets, or smartphones, creating a barrier to responding to an online survey during working hours. They did suggest, however, that a district might set up a station with a device for bus drivers to use in a break room to respond. A few other people mentioned that some staff members are not comfortable with online survey formats for a variety of reasons and that providing a paper option might be helpful.

In a few conversations, language barriers for people who prefer a language other than English came up. While staff members may have some comfort communicating in English, the level of comfort and proficiency varies. One person also noted that they have people working in their district who speak a Mesoamerican language such as Mam that is primarily oral. They wondered if there might be an audio option to administer and respond to the survey. In our individual interviews with a few bilingual and multilingual staff members, we heard that translations can also cause barriers, particularly if the translation isn't of good quality; in fact, the people interviewed said they would likely prefer to respond to the survey in English rather than their home language to help ensure that they understood what the questions are asking.

Communications

People also emphasized the importance of outreach messaging related to the survey. Several people shared that they thought a lack of enthusiasm or prioritization

from district and school leadership could play a role in a lack of staff response. Many people thought that workers would be much less likely to participate if messaging doesn't include a clear, direct explanation of the survey's purpose and plans for how the results will be used. In addition, if people don't see the survey as different from existing surveys asking about similar topics, participants thought they and others would be less likely to pay attention or respond. A few people also shared a concern that if email is the only or primary way to reach staff about the survey, then many people would likely not see or even receive notifications. For some people, this is because of the volume of emails they receive from their school and district. For others, regular, consistent access to email can be a challenge, particularly in parts of the state with less reliable internet access.

Section 4 describes suggestions about communications that participants thought could be helpful in encouraging participation.

Concerns about Use of Results

Many people – across a variety of roles – also wondered whether and how the results of the survey would be used and thought perhaps that uncertainty might be a deterrent to participation. While participants expressed hopes that the survey would help in some way to address recruitment and retention issues, we heard a healthy amount of skepticism that the results would even be considered. We also heard concerns that, at best, survey results could lead to ill-considered initiatives that don't address the true drivers of recruitment or retention issues or lead to "blame" or finger-pointing at particular individuals or organizations. A few school administrators described experiencing this outcome from previous TELL surveys and said they felt a "breach of trust" in the way those results were used after receiving assurances that would not happen. In discussions about anonymity, several people also shared that they would hesitate to respond to the survey due to fears that their responses might be individually discernible by their school or district. One person said a barrier for them

would be "thinking that the district would have access to my answers and information."

In one conversation with school administrators, a couple of people voiced concerns that the survey results would lead to a focus on topics unrelated to workforce recruitment and retention. A couple of people also said they want to see any new efforts be given enough time and attention to determine if they are having an impact before moving on to the next idea. For example, one person said they want to better understand how recent "grow-your-own programs" in districts are or are not working to support recruitment and retention. Another person emphasized the need for "careful meaning making" or interpretation of the results to ensure that the results meet the purpose of and people's expectations for the survey.

> "While conducting the survey it should be communicated that the questions are looking at the systems rather than the people. Questions need to be designed in a way that they don't put the blame on a person but illuminate the gaps in the system."

SECTION 4: WHAT WILL HELP ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

We heard a variety of ways that schools, districts, and the state could encourage participation. Participants offered these ideas and suggestions in an effort to address many of the barriers they identified. Those suggestions fell in four general categories: responsiveness, accessibility, and communications, as well as particular types of incentives.

Importance of Responsiveness

Several people said that simply showing someone is paying attention to the responses and input and that the survey has led to actual, tangible outcomes and actions would itself be a strong incentive. Participants acknowledged that they may disagree with a decision that ODE, their district, school, or the state legislature makes as a result of

> "Accountability is demonstrated as follow up."

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the survey, but having the decision maker lay out *how* they came to their conclusion based on survey results would be key.

Increasing Accessibility

Participants shared a variety of ideas they thought would make the survey more accessible to a broad range of workers.

Addressing Time Constraints

While we heard many concerns about time constraints, participants also had several suggestions to provide time to workers. These include:

- Make sure to offer time during the work day for people to respond;
- Consider carving out time during regular staff meetings when people can take the survey;
- Use time during an in-service day, an early release day, or a late start day;
- Consider the timing of when the survey is administered, particularly avoiding May / June and August / September (people often mentioned October or "late September to early November" as an opportune time); and
- Include responding to the survey as a step in the performance evaluation process.

"Mid-October, about six weeks into the school year, is when people are in their rhythm. Alternatively, the midst of spring, around January or February, could also be a good time."

Language Support

Several of the school administrators, classified employees, and school personnel officers we spoke with said they would like to make sure staff members whose first language is not English are able to participate in whatever language they would prefer. In particular, we heard the need for communications in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Mam. When we interviewed bilingual family engagement staff members, however, those interviewees said they would prefer to participate in the survey in English due to past experiences with poor translations in their first languages. We heard that there is a wide range of English comfort and proficiency,

indicating that while some people may feel comfortable responding in English, others may not. The interviewees' input points to the need to ensure translations are accurate and understandable. In addition, as one school personnel officer described, other forms of language support besides just translations, such as interpretation, might be just as important, particularly for oral languages like Mam and other Mesoamerican languages.

Flexibility

One area of tension was in the desire to have flexible survey formats to help increase accessibility and participation alongside a strong preference for anonymity. Several participants thought that offering a paper version of the survey in addition to an online version would help encourage participation for people who either are not comfortable using an online format or who live in an area without reliable internet access. At the same time, those participants acknowledged that there could be a trade-off in less anonymity with a paper survey. Relatedly, a couple of people suggested offering an interview format or some audio version in order to support people who may be less comfortable with a written format – either online or on paper – or who might need language support. Here, too, they recognized such formats would lead to less anonymity and could be time consuming for both the participant and whomever was conducting the interview or supporting an audio version.

Incentives for Participation

In addition, people offered ideas for different types of incentives to encourage more responses. While some kind of monetary incentive (such as a gift card or a raffle for a gift card) was often one of the first things people suggested, there are other types of incentives that people thought would be helpful. Again, people placed high value on time serving as an incentive. One person said that "allowing staff to leave work early" if they complete the survey would be a strong incentive.

Some of the incentive suggestions fall under the category of an activity. These include offering food in conjunction with responding to the survey. One person said they think it is important to offer food to both "show appreciation" and "nurture staff" at the same time. A few people thought that schools could incorporate a game or some

fun component into taking the survey. One person suggested creating a kind of scavenger hunt within the survey, inviting people to both respond and pay close attention to the content while making a game of the survey.

Using the Pilot Survey to Build Participation

> "Knowing the outcome of the survey and how the feedback will be used too could be an incentive for people to take the survey."

As mentioned above, many people said that a primary incentive for their participation would be a meaningful response from decisionmakers, expressing appreciation for the input and showing how they considered and acted upon worker input. We also heard skepticism that without evidence that their input matters, people would bring an assumption that their responses would not matter. ODE could use the responses from the pilot survey in 2025 to develop a reporting protocol and demonstrate clearly what they heard from participants. Even if there are no immediate decisions or actions taken from the pilot survey, an acknowledgement of people's time, energy, and effort as well as some learnings from the pilot responses will be important to build ongoing trust that people's input matters.

One group also discussed how ODE might consider approaching the pilot year of the survey. The group shared experiences with past surveys when they experienced tensions over how survey content was framed. They wanted to see careful attention paid to framing and thought including different perspectives in the framing would help surface how different people migh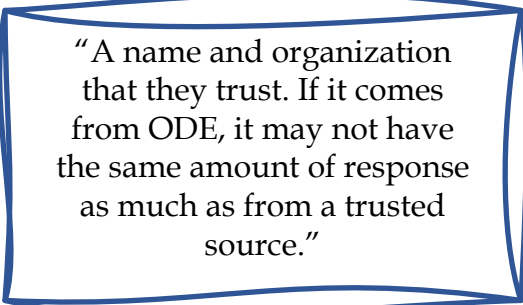t perceive the content. As a way to incorporate those different perspectives and encourage participation in the first year of the survey, they suggested "An incentive would be to provide opportunities for input on how the questions are framed. . . . There should be ways to do that with the pilot survey and use early lessons learned on the pilot on question framing."

> "For the old TELL survey we worked with our admin team to say why it was important. We put together a healthy competition by school to compare participation. That negated some of the concerns about only disgruntled people taking the survey."

Clear, Direct Communication across Multiple Channels

People frequently mentioned the importance of explicit, clear, and direct communications from ODE, districts, and schools about the survey as well as ensuring communications come through multiple channels at multiple times before and while the survey is active.

When we asked people about who they thought might be the best person or entity to invite people to participate, we heard a wide range of responses. Overall, people felt that an invitation from someone they had a personal connection to or a relationship with would be the most effective. Some people thought that invitations coming from ODE would carry a message of statewide importance. Others thought that if the survey comes from ODE, people will interpret it as "more mandates and requirements added to previous mandates and requirements."
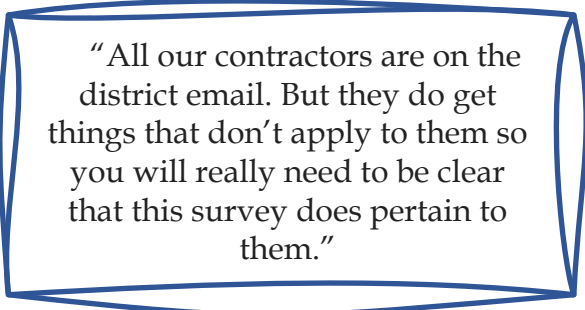
> "A name and organization that they trust. If it comes from ODE, it may not have the same amount of response as much as from a trusted source."

We also heard differing opinions about how effective messages from school leadership (superintendents or principals) might be, with some people saying that staff receive so many messages from leadership it would be easy to miss or skip over another message. Other people thought that district and school leaders could play a significant role in conveying the message of importance and value in participation. No matter who the invitation comes from, many people hope to see leaders convey enthusiasm and support for the survey and interest in the results. Many of the associations we talked with offered to do what they could to encourage members to participate. Several people noted that their membership list is incomplete and they are often missing contact information for their members.

Many conversations stressed that communications needed to clearly state *who* the survey was for and specifically name roles and particular types of schools, such as charter schools or hospital and treatment schools. Otherwise, people would assume it was not meant for them, as many groups of school staff are not used to being included or asked about their working experiences, particularly non-licensed staff members.

In terms of what messaging would be helpful to encourage participation, people offered the following suggestions:

- Communicate clearly and transparently how the results are intended to be used when introducing the survey;

> "All our contractors are on the district email. But they do get things that don't apply to them so you will really need to be clear that this survey does pertain to them."

- Give people a deadline to complete the survey;
- Communicate at multiple points: alert people prior to when the survey is open, remind people in the middle, send a final message before the survey concludes, and make sure to follow up with people to acknowledge their input and any actions take;
- Clearly acknowledge *who* the survey is for to make sure all groups of staff know they are included; and
- Create a promotional campaign that places importance on the effort, ties it to decision-making, and includes a "human" element through highlighting some real people or stories. People cautioned that it would be important to avoid focusing just on problems, however.
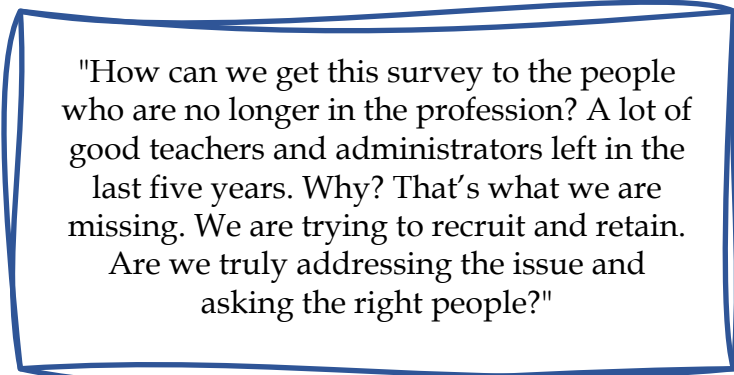
We also heard that while emails are a vital channel for communications, people are concerned about some staff members' access to email, as well as the email getting lost amidst a large volume of emails. In particular, we heard concerns about reaching contracted staff, as well as people who have recently left their positions. During a conversation with staff members working in human resources departments, a few people noted that contracted staff often do have district emails and that they also often have personal emails on record for people who have left their positions in order to provide them with W-2s and other types of information. Several groups voiced wanting to make sure there was a way to hear from people who recently left their school, district, or the education workforce to better understand how to improve workforce retention. One person suggested that ODE could partner with higher education programs in universities and colleges that prepare teachers and other

members of the education workforce in order to understand what could help support recruitment.

SECTION 5: CONTENT EXPECTATIONS

During conversations, we asked people to consider a list of broad potential topics that could be included in the survey. That list is included in the slides in Appendix A. Generally, many people thought that list encompassed what they would

"How can we get this survey to the people who are no longer in the profession? A lot of good teachers and administrators left in the last five years. Why? That's what we are missing. We are trying to recruit and retain. Are we truly addressing the issue and asking the right people?"

expect to be in the statewide survey. We heard some desire for tailored survey questions that reflect the unique challenges faced by different districts or regions, as well as questions that are tailored for particular roles. People also offered some perspectives on how they or others might perceive the examples we provided.

We noticed some general categories of topics came up most frequently and generated energy and interest in the conversations from many different people. These include:

- *School Climate:* People frequently gravitated towards this category, noting that it can mean very different things to different people and in different settings. One person said they hope the survey will ask about whether schools or districts are "welcoming" spaces and another mentioned "racism in the workplace." We did hear from people in roles like substitute teachers and school psychologists that because of the nature of their work, their responses on both School Climate and Safety may differ dramatically when thinking about their assignments at different schools.

- ***Professional Development Opportunities:*** People also frequently mentioned professional development opportunities. Several people would like to see "access to professional development opportunities." Those people said they often felt like access was a big barrier to professional development, particularly related to licensing and credentials. Relatedly, a number of people would like to see "career advancement" or "career pathways" for all staff and not just licensed or certified staff within this category or as a standalone category.
- ***Leadership:*** A few people thought it would be important to make sure to include different types of leadership, not just administrative leadership. A couple of people used the term "teacher leaders." In other discussions people wondered what – or who "leadership" – refers to.
- ***Safety:*** In a couple of conversations people discussed what the topic of "safety" might cover and how it could look very different depending on roles. One person shared that they would like to see safety include school facilities.

People also provided ideas for both additional broad categories of topics as well as more detailed topics within broader categories. This next set of ideas about content topics was not quite as widely discussed, but we still noticed they came up in more than a couple conversations or were raised by more than a few people.

Working Conditions

The term "working conditions" came up in several conversations; however, we heard different variations on what people thought fell under the category of "working conditions." In one group, school administrators discussed wanting to see how broader expectations from the state or the community impact members of the education workforce, particularly for people of color who are administrators or in leadership positions and particularly when

> "We need to acknowledge our political context. How teachers show up in the classroom and the types of topics they are allowed to talk about with their kids; some are feeling very attacked. We talk about cultural awareness, but how are they navigating that? Our superintendents of color when they talk about equity work are getting attacked."

those expectations differ or are in opposition to one another. In another group, substitute teachers talked about having information about schools and students they are serving. One substitute teacher shared the example of the challenges in not having a list of students' preferred names or students' IEPs when they enter a classroom and the impact on their ability to do their job well and create a positive learning environment. Another said it would be helpful to know more about different schools' student conduct protocols.

Content Related to Students and Student Voice

We heard interest in including a topic related to students or in somehow incorporating student voice in the survey process. One person suggested identifying what students would want to ask their teachers and workers in their schools about their working experiences. Another person wondered if "School Climate" would be a space to include student voice or opinions in some way. Other people talked about students and the survey in terms of how the student population might impact staff working experiences. A couple of people said they are seeing student issues or behaviors impact working conditions so felt this would be important to include. On the other hand, some people cautioned that they don't want to see a working experiences survey become focused on attitudes towards students.

Additional Topics of Interest

Additional topics came up in discussions though with less frequency or by fewer people overall. They are worth noting, however, as they were important to the participants who raised them. These include:
- ***Burnout***: People raised the topic of burnout in a couple of conversations. We heard a desire to better understand what people view as "burnout" as well as the sources of burnout.
- ***Workload***: People mentioned workload generally as well as in specifically talking about staff to student ratios. A couple of people referred to wanting a better understanding of how staff are spending their time, particularly on work that goes beyond traditional academic or educational work. They thought this

would be helpful so the broader community understands all of the work that members of the education workforce undertake on a regular basis in schools and districts.

- ***Technology:*** One person mentioned the topic AI specifically while another person mentioned student cell phone use.
- ***Accountability Measures:*** A category that covered accountability came up in a couple of conversations. One person suggested a group of topics under "Expectations, Standards, and Accountability" as a category.
- ***Purpose:*** A couple of people noted that it would be helpful to better understand workforce motivations. One person suggested asking, "What provides purpose for you / your job? What keeps you in your job?" Relatedly, one person suggested asking about people's "job satisfaction."

> "I'd like to ask people, what would you do about it? I'd want to hear their ideas for improvement so it doesn't just turn into a method for complaining. Get our employees' voice about what we could do."

- ***Compensation:*** Compensation in general came up in a few conversations. People who raised it often did not go into detail beyond stating they were interested in seeing compensation covered in the survey. One bilingual staff member did specify that they wanted to see compensation cover differential payment for all bilingual/multilingual staff members who use more than one language at work.
- ***External factors:*** In one conversation, people suggested including a section on factors outside of the school workplace (e.g. childcare or housing availability and affordability) as these can be just as crucial as workplace issues in recruiting and retaining employees.
- ***Wellness / well-being / behavioral health***: One person said that while well-being is often discussed in the context of students, they don't see wellness applied as often to discussions around school and district staff and administrators.

- ***Opportunity for generating solutions or support***: A few people said they hope the survey will offer an opportunity to share ideas that they and their colleagues have about addressing recruitment and retention. One person referred to wanting to see some "reciprocal accountability" through the survey and thought posing a question about what people think ODE or the state legislature could do to support local or regional efforts would help achieve that.

> "We used to be an institution about academics but now we are all things to all kids and families. Information on the way their day is broken up and how they spend their time and energy would help us really understand that. We get money that supports the academics but what about the other demands?"

SECTION 6: HOPES FOR OUTCOMES FROM THE SURVEY

When we asked participants what they hoped to see as a result of the survey, we noticed that most participants shared hopes related to the education workforce as a whole or as a system rather than individual outcomes. In several cases, people's responses reflected a desire to see impacts involving the broader community within which a school or district is situated. And, people often made the connection between outcomes for the education workforce and better outcomes for students, including, as one person put it, "a positive impact on student retention and success."

> "I hope this helps with changes that support all the different roles."

We did hear some differences in the geographic scope of people's hopes. Some people are more focused on regional or district-level shifts as a result of the survey while others are thinking more about the state as a whole. For instance, some people shared that they hope the survey will help identify common issues at a district or regional level to help set district or regional priorities around retention and recruitment. Another group discussed wanting to see

> "I'd like the survey to lead to more open communication between the buildings in our district. Often feels like it's the buildings vs. district office. It would be nice if we could actually become more of a collaborative team."

a "coherent state strategy" about how to better streamline or connect "duplicative work" of different state initiatives or efforts related to the education workforce. We also heard hopes that the survey would help paint a clearer and/or accurate picture of what is happening regarding the education workforce. One person used the phrase "brink of disaster" to describe their sense of education workforce shortages in Oregon.

People shared the following hopes:

- A clear correlation between survey input and future investments;
- Connections made across schools or districts and with communities;
- Identification of professional roles where Oregon needs to concentrate on growing a workforce and an increase of hires in those roles;
- More training in areas the survey is able to identify;
- Decreased ratios for staff to students;
- Resources and funding devoted to some action related to recruitment and retention; and
- Desire to see a "workforce lens" applied to any statewide education initiative, taking into consideration what the impacts might be on the education workforce for different initiatives.

> "It would shine a light for legislators and the Department of Education on everything the workforce is carrying in light of what our kids need. It would restore trust and build confidence in what our workshop is currently doing, and identify areas where we need to grow our workforce based on the needs of our students."

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our conversations over the course of spring and summer 2024 raised a number of opportunities for future community engagement. Most notably, people repeatedly talked about wanting to see acknowledgement that their input was heard and how that input is influencing decisions around recruitment and retention. In any community

engagement process, we encourage decision makers to reach out to the people who gave their input and let them know how the input was used. Participants' desire for that kind of response or communication came through clearly in this engagement process. We recognize that there will likely be both short-term decisions (i.e. if the survey results elevate areas where districts, ODE, or the state legislature may be able to act within months), as well as longer-term decisions that will take years. We encourage ODE to ensure that there is broad, clear communication whenever a decision is made based on *this engagement* and more importantly, the survey results – and why ODE or decision makers came to that decision – even if the decision may appear minor or if the decision happens years after participants responded.

The planned pilot survey in 2025 offers some immediate opportunities for ODE to more deeply explore the ideas and issues this engagement process has surfaced. We offer the following recommendations for how ODE might integrate community engagement into the pilot survey process:

- Consider follow-up engagement with people who participated in this process to test out content framing for the pilot survey;
- Conduct post-pilot community engagement with people who respond to the pilot survey to learn how the pilot worked or didn't work for people;
- Consider forming an "outreach and organizing" team with partner organizations and with people who participated in this process to help develop outreach communications and drive participation in the pilot survey; and
- Consider conducting participatory meaning making with a cross-section of the education workforce to review and analyze the results of the survey.

In addition, as described in Appendix B, this community engagement process identified some participation gaps. ODE might consider additional, targeted engagement either prior to the pilot or immediately after to ensure that people in those roles have input into the process. For instance, there was significant concern that it was and will continue to be difficult to hear from contract employees. ODE could consider hosting focus groups for substitute teachers and / or for bus drivers employed by a contract agency (rather than directly by a school district). While we heard from people who are in those roles as employees of a district, we did not hear from people in those roles who are working through a contractor. Due to employment

status, there may be both differences in how to support those people's participation in the survey as well as in how they respond to the survey.

SECTION 8: CONCLUSION

This engagement process was intended to provide ODE with a sense of what people in a variety of roles in schools and districts want to see for the new statewide education workforce experiences survey. While this particular period of engagement has ended, we encourage ODE to return to people in Oregon's education workforce to share how their input will inform the upcoming pilot survey, future surveys, and any decisions made as a result of survey input to support recruitment and retention efforts. This community engagement process clearly calls for deliberate efforts from decision makers to demonstrate what they hear from people as well as how that input impacts decisions and results in any actions.

We have been honored to get to talk with a wide range of staff members and leaders from Oregon schools and districts who care so deeply about their colleagues, schools, students, and communities. Throughout this process, nearly everyone we talked with expressed a strong desire that new efforts like the new education workforce survey will lead to better experiences for the workers themselves, as well as for Oregon students and the communities to which schools belong.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Community Conversation Materials

Appendix B. Community Engagement Process

Welcome!

Please share in the chat :

- Name and role
- Where you are joining from today
- What's one thing you love about your school community?

Introductions

Oregon's Kitchen Table is a statewide program that creates ways for community members to influence the decisions that affect their lives. We are a program of Portland State University.

Today's Discussion

Hear and learn from each other about about how to make the survey accessible and helpful to everyone who works in schools

- Background
- Pairs / Trios ~ Share
- Discussion on barriers and supports
- Discussion on survey topic areas
- Next steps and Appreciations

Education Workforce Survey: Background

SENATE BILL 283 (PASSED IN 2023 BY STATE LEGISLATURE)

Directs ODE to conduct annual statewide survey of **all members** of the Oregon education workforce, including licensed and classified staff

GOAL

To provide a sense of the working experience among education staff within all education providers, including culture and climate.

Education Workforce Survey: Community Engagement

MAY – AUGUST 2024

The Oregon Department of Education is partnering with OKT to hear from variety of people in different staff roles and learn about how the education workforce survey can be most accessible and effective.

HOW INPUT WILL BE USED

Your input will help ODE draft survey standards (content, delivery, management, and use) to be reviewed and adopted by the State Board of Education. ODE will then create a pilot survey for 2025.

Discussion Guidelines

- help us hear everybody

- be respectful of your neighbors
- listen with curiosity
- everyone brings different experiences and ideas

Tell us about a time when you felt like your input really mattered in a decision. This could be any time / place in your life (not just at your school or work)

What made you feel that way?

- Each share for 3 minutes
- OKT team will send a broadcast message to switch
- Return and share what you noticed in each other's stories (verbally or in chat)

Pairs / Trios

Share Out

Discussion

What are barriers or challenges you and other staff in your districts and schools might face in responding to a survey asking about working experience?

What do you think schools / districts / regions might be able to do to encourage and support participation?

Broad Groups of Types of Topics

- Professional Development Opportunities
- School Climate, Belonging, and Safety
- Diversity, Equity and Cultural Awareness
- Family and Community Engagement
- Leadership
- Staff Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices
- Working Conditions and Job Satisfaction

As you look at this list, do you notice topic areas that are missing?

Based on the topics we talked about, if the survey went really well, what do you hope it would lead to in your districts or in the state?

NEXT STEPS

OKT will create a report about the input. We'll share that report with ODE and with people who give us their emails. We will also post it on our website.

ODE will create draft survey standards with your input. The State Board of Education will consider and adopt standards.

Once the BOE has adopted the standards, ODE will create the survey and conduct a pilot in winter 2025.

APPENDIX B. Community Engagement Process

Community Input on Oregon's New Education Workforce Survey

Community Engagement Process

From May to August 2024, Oregon's Kitchen Table conducted a series of interviews and community conversations to gather input from Oregon school staff members in different roles and parts of the state. The following provides additional details about the community engagement process, including engagement activities, outreach, participation, and limitations.

Outreach and Engagement Activities

Community Connector Interviews

At the start of planning for engagement, OKT conducted approximately 10 small group or individual interviews with community connectors from organizations that bring together people who serve in different licensed, classified, and administrative roles across the state. We spoke with people from the following organizations:

- Oregon Trail Regional Educators Network
- Oregon School Personnel Association
- Oregon Substitute Teachers Association
- Oregon Association of Educational Service Districts
- Oregon School Psychologists Association
- Coalition of Oregon School Administrators
- Oregon Education Association

- Oregon School Employees Association
- Oregon Trail Regional Educators Network
- Oregon School for the Deaf
- ODE staff members working with charter schools
- ODE staff members working with correctional, hospital, and treatment schools

These interviews were intended to help inform the design of the eventual outreach and the engagement plan. They also helped to identify potential settings and co-hosts for community conversations as well as outreach strategies. Community connector interviews also helped the OKT and ODE team to frame the content for engagement. OKT continued to work with these groups to invite their members to participate in the community conversations or submit written input via an online form.

Community Conversations and Individual Interviews

OKT worked with several of the organizations identified above to hold a series of community conversations and to conduct outreach to their members. OKT had a table at the Oregon School Employees Association's (OSEA) spring conference, and spoke with dozens of OSEA members who visited the table. We also presented on the new survey and the community engagement effort at the Oregon Education Association's (OEA) spring board meeting. Both these events were held in Portland but drew members from all over the state.

Participation

OKT heard from approximately 200 people in a variety of settings. Approximately 125 people participated in the 8 conversations (2 in person and 6 via Zoom), which ranged from 5 attendees to 50 attendees. One in-person conversation took place in Boardman at the Oregon Trail Regional Educator Network's spring meeting. The other in-person conversation took place at the Oregon School Personnel Association's summer meeting in Portland. This meeting also drew members from districts all over the state.

In addition, 7 people submitted input via writing through an online form. A member of the OKT team also conducted individual interviews with 7 people who were

in a variety of family engagement positions in different districts. OKT presented to or spoke with approximately 60 people at the OSEA and OEA meetings mentioned above.

Demographic Information about Participants

Due to the limited scope and timeline for this project, as well as the focus on group settings for engagement, we did not collect detailed demographic information from participants. When engagement activities take place in a group, discussion setting – either by Zoom or in-person – we do not ask people to publicly provide demographic information about themselves. Participants' focus on anonymity throughout this process underscored the importance of not collecting or providing personally identifying information. As participants pointed out, one or two pieces of demographic information can often be enough to identify individuals, especially in particular schools or districts. Some participants did choose to self-identify in different ways when they introduced themselves or shared their perspective or experience during the conversations. This was not consistent among participants or across conversations.

Partnering with different statewide associations provided opportunities to ensure that we were hearing from people in a variety of roles as well as from different parts of the state and types of districts. For example, the Oregon Trail Regional Educators Network hosted an in-person community conversation with educators in parts of Eastern Oregon.

Should ODE wish to hear from particular groups of the state's education workforce, we recommend a longer timeline for community engagement with focused outreach and organizing. A more robust community engagement process would allow for different ways to hear from people that help to ensure people's anonymity as they share demographic information.

Project Limitations

This community engagement process took place under a number of factors that limited the extent to which we were able to host activities and thus the breadth of participation. Community engagement activities occurred either during the final weeks of the school year or in summer months, when many school employees' attention is

focused elsewhere. District calendars also vary widely in terms of the final weeks of the school year, with many schools in eastern Oregon finishing in May while schools in the Portland area finished in mid-June. This engagement process also occurred against a backdrop of announcements around school budget challenges and staff cuts in many districts, as well as recent tense contract negotiations in a few districts. Given all of these factors, several of the people we spoke with during the community connector interviews and throughout the community conversations cautioned that participation in this process would likely be limited and that community engagement should continue after the launch of the survey.

Due to these limitations, we recognize that participation in this community engagement process is not a comprehensive representation of Oregon's large and very diverse education workforce across different geographic areas. Types of roles also differ greatly from district to district and even school to school. One missing perspective that is noticeable is staff who are "under contract to provide services to a public education provider" (per Senate Bill 283 Section 4). Several participants explained that there are many different kinds of contracts that schools and districts have for different positions, including with other public education providers such as Educational Service Districts. We heard this is especially true for roles like school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and special education staff members. Other people shared that some schools and districts contract with companies to provide staff such as bus drivers or substitute teachers. This varies across parts of the state, and there is not widespread knowledge about who contracting entities might be or how to connect with them to reach the individuals who are employed by those entities.

While we weren't able to hear directly from people who are in these contracted positions, this information is helpful as ODE considers standards or guidance about how schools and districts can ensure the survey is available to all staff, employed by the district or not. In addition, substitute teachers we talked with shared some of the companies that Oregon schools and districts contract with to provide substitute teachers. Participants in interviews and conversations did share information about how their districts and schools might be able to communicate with those who are providing services but not employed by the district or school. As ODE pilots the new statewide

survey, we recommend ODE staff consider additional targeted outreach and engagement to hear from people in those contracted roles.